

Patio farming

Not everyone needs or wants a large edible garden. It can simply be that the yard is not big enough to contain a raised bed. It may be that there are not enough hours in a day to keep a large garden going. A one or two person household might not eat enough greenery to make a whole garden worthwhile.

Even with these conditions, it is still possible to grow a salad that might last until late spring. If all one wants is enough leafy greens for salads, a large planting pot can serve as a “Patio Farm”. The idea is that one can crowd certain plants to a degree, and harvest only a part, leaving the rest to grow.

Unlike the vegetables we grow for their fruits – cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, etc., those we eat for their leaves can be harvested one leaf at a time. The best plants for this technique are lettuce, spinach and mustard greens. These kinds of vegetables grow in rosettes, with their leaves arranged tightly around a small core.

These leaves develop from the center, so it is possible to harvest a couple of the outer, larger, older leaves without harming the whole plant.



A planting pot is a small garden!

To try growing your own salad, first find a plastic plant pot at least 14” in diameter. Larger will work, of course, but any smaller will not contain a large enough planting area to make the process worthwhile. If the pot was used previously, it should be scrupulously clean, so any problems that might have bothered the previous inhabitant will not recur.

Make sure that there are holes for excess water to drain.

If there are no drainage holes, use another pot or drill holes into the bottom. Do not put rocks in the pot. All that does is decrease the amount of space for the roots to grow. Some of us have attractive jardinières without drainage. These are better used to hold a smaller, plainer pot. It is not a bad idea to place rocks in the bottom of the jardinière, which will catch some of the water and create a more humid area around the growing plant.

Fill it with a good potting soil, not garden soil, which can have excess clay to impede drainage, or might even



An ornamental pot is better used as a container for a plain one!

contain insect pests or pathogens. Definitely do not reuse soil that had problems like these.

If reusing soil from a previous season, but it will be necessary to add compost to it as plants remove many nutrients as they grow. Since the plants in this little garden will be mainly leaves, it is important for them to have the ample supply of nitrogen provided by compost.

Planting in this mini-garden is simple. Seeds can be placed about one or one and one half inch apart. Do not plant them too deeply; no deeper than the width of the seed and covered with a light dusting of soil.

In about two weeks the seedlings will emerge. If they are too crowded, thin out the extras, rinse them off and add them to the salad.

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