

The Pot That Was Inevitable

You knew it was going to happen. First there were window boxes and then came hanging baskets. I don't speak historically: this is not about the hanging gardens of Babylon. This is about our own recent gardening experience. After boxes and baskets came an exuberance of pots! Tall and dramatic, short and fat, carved or comical or contrived, there was a pot for every taste. They came in stone, clay, foam, fiberglass, concrete, hypertufa troughs, terra cotta, antique iron, even teak.

Along with the proliferation of pots came newer and better balanced potting soils with clever schemes for watering as well as substances in the mix to hold and release water. Gardeners excelled in finding plants appropriate for containers, from modest herb combinations to exotic jungle themes, flamboyant tropicals. Container gardening was fad, fun, fashion and a stretch of creative talent.

So here we are with all these wonderful pots ready for the next phase of container gardening, the vegetable plot in a pot! I know, you have had tomatoes in pots for years but today there are other vegetables bred to flourish in containers. They are going to be smaller, following the example of patio tomatoes. Can you imagine successive seedlings of 'little finger' carrots? One tender and juicy variety is 'Mignon', another is 'Mini Finger'. One vegetable that is both easy to grow and a handsome plant is eggplant. Two f1 hybrids are available as seed, 'Baby Rosanna' and 'Orlando'.

'Baby Rosanna' is only two feet tall and provides a summer of elongated golf ball sized fruits. Not only are they without the bitterness you had to blanch out of large eggplants, they also hold their fine quality long after picking. 'Orlando' has the same fine flavored fruit on a heavy yielding plant perfect for a container on a sunny patio.

So attractive it may pass for a flower is a dwarf runner bean, 'Hestia'. These dwarf bushy plants have handsome foliage, oval and slightly heart-shaped and the stems are lined with red and white flowers. So successful have gardeners been with 'greens' in small spaces that there are now varieties adaptable to pots. Can't you picture a pot featuring a circle of tennis ball sized mini iceberg lettuces? Not just small, but with greatly improved taste and crunch. Because they are so dense, one is lunch! Successive seedings of 'Mini Green Improved' will keep them coming.

Another lettuce is 'Tintin' a slightly larger 'Little Gem' type with bubbled leaves. Found in the Thompson and Morgan catalog, it bears up well in summer heat when most lettuces tend to bolt. This catalog also features a new hybrid spinach for pots, Spinach Fiorana f1 hybrid, delicious at any stage of growth "...good resistance against downy mildew...and good bolting resistance for summer sowings."

Surely squash is one vegetable you never expected would fit into a pot. In previous gardens I remember squashes hiding under the leaves until they were too large to fit into the kitchen sink. How easily they could be harvested from a pot with no place to hide. Summer squash 'Black Forest' climbs to save space, using a stout cane

or a trellis in the pot. This squash and another one, 'Midnight', have dark green slim six-inch fruits.

There are new peppers and tomatoes this year especially developed to grow well in containers. Pepper foliage has always been elegant enough for the most refined sunny flower border and what could be prettier than a patio pot graced with sweet pepper 'Mohawk' with its deep gold peppers.

The new tomato plants for pots have become more compact and attractive as well although in growing tomatoes it is the taste that really counts. Bon appetite!

To ensure a tasty crop, you must begin with a good quality potting soil and even if you choose one containing fertilizer in the mix, you have to be observant of the cultural requirements for whatever you are growing, using a liquid or slow-release fertilizer as needed. Pots usually must be watered daily if it is especially hot or windy, which does wash out or dilute the food you have just put in. In pot culture of course, you do know the valuable water is going to the roots and not wandering all over a half acre.