

Nutritious gardens in containers

By Melinda Myers

Don't let a lack of time or space get in the way of gardening your way to a healthy lifestyle. Plant a container of nutritious vegetables and herbs. Include a few planters on the front porch, back patio or right outside the kitchen door.

All that's needed is some potting mix, fertilizer, plants and a container with drainage holes. A 15- to 24-inch diameter pot or 24- to 36-inch long window box is a good starting size.

Bigger containers hold more plants and moisture longer, so it can be watered less frequently.

Check containers daily and water thoroughly as needed. Self-watering pots need less frequent watering, allowing busy gardeners and travelers the opportunity to grow plants in pots with minimal care.

Fill the container with a well-drained potting mix. Read the label on the container mix bag. Add a slow release organic nitrogen fertilizer, like Milorganite at planting for better results with less effort. It provides small amounts of nutrients throughout most of the season and eliminates the need to mix and water in fertilizer throughout the growing season.

Sprinkle a bit more on the soil surface midseason or when changing out your plantings.

Mix colorful flowers with nutritious vegetables for attractive, healthy results. Bright Lights Swiss Chard, pansies (their flowers are edible), colorful leaf lettuce, spinach, radishes, and trailing ivy make a great cool season

combination. Fresh-from-the-container-garden vegetables make the best tasting salads and the greens provide Vitamins A and C as well as calcium.

Use the pansy flowers to dress up a salad or frozen in ice cubes for an added gourmet touch to beverages.

For summer, use a tomato, pepper, eggplant or peas, beans, and cucumbers trained on a trellis. All are packed full of nutrients and make a great vertical accent. Surround the towering vegetables with purple basil, tri-color sage, carrots, beets and a colorful trailing annual like verbena, lantana, or bidens.

Don't forget to squeeze in a few onions or garlic. The fragrant foliage can be decorative and these vegetables help lower blood sugar and cholesterol, while aiding in digestion.

So be creative and add a few small-scale, attractive vegetables high in nutritional value to a variety of containers this season.

Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written more than 20 gardening books.