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12 VEGETABLES

Plants are simple places. A few concrete blocks, or bricks, make them harsh places to grow plants, but with a little help from Simon Devine it can be done

Growing Vegetables IN UNUSUAL PLACES

IF YOU'VE BEEN to watch a few seedlings on the floor of the patio you wouldn't be surprised to find them others away, eaten by birds, trampled underfoot or hidden for a crop. To grow successfully in pots on the patio involves providing conditions that counter the environment.

PROVIDING WATER AND NUTRIENTS
Plants need certain fundamental conditions if they are to grow well. Light, water, oxygen and mineral nutrients are the most important. You also need to provide shelter, sometimes manual and physical support to keep them falling over.

OXYGEN
There is plenty of oxygen around in the atmosphere, but unfortunately plants are not very good at transporting the oxygen to the leaves all the way down to the roots and so each part of the plant has to have more or less its own supply. Whilst it is true that leaves make oxygen as part of photosynthesis, the rest of the plant uses up as much, if not more, in respiration. Most of the earth's oxygen comes from plankton in the sea and not from plants on the surface.

This need for an oxygen condition where the oxygen supply is used up. This means that an obvious thing to say, but a plastic pot used in a watering tray can soon become stagnant.

So later there is a great need for a continual supply of nutrients. It's a good idea to feed your patio plants weekly.

Add some slow-release fertilizer to the compost as this will help to keep things topped up. It can be bought as pellets and you simply throw a couple into a pot where you are filling a wide compost. The addition of a little all-round fertilizer to the soil does not mean you are going to swamp the plants with extra chemicals. On the contrary, there is no real reason to treat them as delicately and an environmentally conscious use of the rest of the garden. No pesticide need go anywhere near your patio because they are easier to keep clear of pots by mechanical means - rubbing gently all over the leaves, covering delicate plants with small pieces of horticultural fleece, etc.

WATER
Leaves are the heart of the plant, they move water from the roots and also generate food for the whole system as well as giving the plant rigidity. It really is true to say that most plants, including trees, wonderful examples of this is wheat, old-fashioned sheep any way, where the plant is made from thick, but tries to over 1m (1 1/2) high. On top of this plant is its heavy head of fruit. No modern human technology has ever

PLANTS TO GROW
If you only have a small space, you have to be imaginative. A window in a spare room is an ideal spot for growing plants. Nothing to worry about building glass, sheltering against a window, even a set of those little wooden ones that get from across the B&Q for a few quid will do. You can grow a constant supply of salad crops on those shelves in the winter and if you have daylight hours only a few minutes of light in the afternoon is enough to let the plants that it is August and not December.

You can grow lettuce, radish, cress, tomatoes and all kinds of herbs in pots - really anything you can grow in a pot. You can even grow pots for apple, pears in large pots for a very early crop! A pot is also a great place to start seeds if you don't have room elsewhere.

ENTER THE DEAD CHEAP GREENHOUSE
It is possible to buy - for around £10 - one of those plastic-covered greenhouses that are sold in garden centres designed as greenhouses that are put in a row of these along the exterior walls of the house and consequently a greenhouse facility in a very small space.

A word of warning: one study might find to exclude my wonderful greenhouse from next door's garden. To avoid >

15

13 Consider carefully how you will fit in.

14 Check in pots are the simplest things to grow.

15 No way buy these cheap little green plastic applicators.

