

NEWS

Sky's the limit with vertical gardens as urban space becomes increasingly scarce

Caroline Berdon, DailyTelegraph

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WITH space in our cities at a premium, it was only a matter of time before gardens went high-density like buildings.

In a vertical garden, vegetables, flowers and fruit all grow and spiral upwards using columns, walls, trellises and arches.

A relatively new idea in Australia, but well established overseas, vertical gardens can be used to transform a roof garden or balcony, create a wall feature in a courtyard, or form an indoor room divider - and they're sprouting up in homes, offices, restaurants and hotels across Aussie towns and cities.

In his practical new book, *Vertical Gardening*, Derek Fell argues that because the trend uses minimal gardening space, it is also easier on the back.

"(A vertical garden) creates a beautiful landscape that saves space, requires less effort, produces high yield, and reduces pest and disease problems," he says.

And there are hundreds of varieties of vegetables, fruits and flowers that are perfect for growing up freestanding and wall-mounted supports.

In fact, he says, some plants such as tomatoes and beans are best grown vertically. A vining pole bean will outyield a bush bean tenfold and a vining vegetable is capable of continuous yields because the more you pick, the more the plant forms new flowers and fruit to prolong the harvest.

"A bush variety, by contrast, will exhaust itself within two to three weeks."

And if it's creative affect that you're after, the sky's the limit. Think climbing roses covering a barn, creepers extending 50 metres to cover the walls of a hotel, a cascade of bright tomatoes on a trellis, or your own climbing column of fresh grapes.

To get your vertical vegetable garden off the ground, Fell advises clearing a planting strip just 30cm wide and assembling some trellis or garden netting - either freestanding or against a wall.

The strip will allow you to grow an "attractive curtain" of climbing fruits, vegetables or flowers, he says, and will also enable you to add more compact plants, such as lettuces or capsicums, as foundation or "footprint" plants. Fell also advises using tall plants, such as sweet corn or okra, as support plants for beans and vining squash.

In fact, the use of these "three sisters" of the vegetable world is used as a space-saving device in Amish gardens, as the American Indians did for centuries before them.

"You may be surprised to learn that there are climbing varieties for most major vegetable families, even climbing zucchini and climbing spinach," Fell says.

Some of these plants have shoots and tendrils that climb by themselves; others, like tomatoes, need assistance. Fell recommends a trip to your local garden centre for advice on varieties that grow well

in your area.

"There simply isn't an easier, more productive way to garden than vertical gardening," Fell says. "It really works."

***Vertical Gardening* by Derek Fell is published by Rodale.**

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