

Gardening in Unusual Spaces!

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Recently, a number of online and hard copy publications have featured articles on gardening in small, unusual or otherwise un-garden-like places. What's causing the sudden interest in gardening in odd spots? I think that the economy being what it is, people want to make what they have more appealing, no matter how small the space. Here are some ideas to consider as you look for new places to garden.

Vertical Spaces – We all have walls of some sort, on our houses, garages and fences to name a few places. Traditionally, we've looked at some kind of trellis or arbor for a vine or maybe even an espaliered fruit tree. Greenery can cover up blank spaces, as well as reduce the transfer of summer heat.

Window boxes can be suspended from brackets in a wall and used for both upright and hanging arrangements. Another idea is a product called "Woolly Pockets." The pockets come in various sizes and are designed to be hung from grommets in the special fabric planter. Even herbs and small vegetables can grow in these things!

Another idea is a vertical succulent garden. Create or reuse a wooden frame and plant it with various small succulents in a well-draining medium. Secure the plants with small pins or wire. Once everything is secured, it is ready to hang. Other salvaged materials such as old shutters or fencing can be turned into planting areas too.

Unlikely Horizontal Places – When thinking about new horizontal garden plots, think up! Up in the air, that is! The roof of the doghouse, a birdhouse or your own house can make interesting planting zones for small rooted varieties. Greenery can reduce heat absorption from above and maintain heat below, depending on the season. Just make sure that the structure can bear the weight and that there is an impermeable layer to block out water leaks.

Other flat spots can appear on outdoor furniture. A table with a permanent center planter can be used for flowers and greenery or a delightful herb cutting area. Imagine passing the scissors to your guests for them to clip their own favorites right on to a meal!

Chairs and benches can make particularly attractive planters. Consider removing the seat of the chair and replacing it with a pot. Training a vine over the seat and back of an old wire bench can also add garden interest.

Containers – Yes, we all know about pots and planters as wonderful areas for gardening, particularly in small spaces or on decks and patios. Think about using these garden spots for other uses too!

A large pot placed in a somewhat permanent location can serve as an attractive base for a large market umbrella. A planter box with tall plants can cover up unsightly electrical or plumbing on the outside of house. Just remember that once filled with soil, these containers can be heavy and just about impossible to move!

Caring for These Garden Spots – Creative as these unusual gardening areas might be, they present a couple of possible challenges too. The first issue is weight. A hanging box or frame or a roof garden requires soil for most plants. Soil, once wet, can get very heavy. Consider the strength of the structure you will use to support the hanging garden containers to make sure that it can bear the weight.

Think about watering needs carefully for flat surfaces as well. Gardening on a roof, while wonderful to look at, may create seepage or leaking problems into the structure below. While it might not be a big issue if it's a doghouse, it would be a huge deal if it means you get a shower in bed!

You'll want to minimize the amount of soil and use a moisture-control mix for most of these unusual planters. However, less soil means smaller root zones for the plants. You might want to use plants that have shallow rooting needs, such as succulents or bromeliads, to compensate for the lack of root zone space.

Finally, these gardening places may require more water than usual. Smaller root zones means less places to hold water, and plants can suffer. Putting these structures in the shade and planning on watering twice a day instead of only once in hot weather can be important factors.

A Landscape Design Example – We have recently undertaken a renovation of part of our yard that has produced a wonderful outdoor entertaining area. It's lovely, offering views of towering pines and Japanese maples, and lots of shade and sun gardening areas.

It looks great, except for the electrical boxes on the back of the house! To incorporate some of the elements I mentioned above, I've planned a freestanding wall, supported by two four-by-four posts set in concrete, about two feet away from the house. Slats will run between the posts with some spaces in between. This will allow access to the panels but block their public view.

On this structure, I will hang some wire baskets that are flat on one side, designed to be hanging baskets. I'll fill these with cocoa mats and moisture control soil, or I may just insert some small pots, hidden from view by the mats. The timer-controlled drip watering system will run up the back and poke through spaces in the slats.

And then I get to experiment! I'm thinking about trying bromeliads out there in the shade, or maybe if it seems like there is enough sun near the top, some herbs. I'll report back on how this all turns out!

Learn all about the selection, planting, care and harvesting of strawberries, blueberries, boysenberries and raspberries at the UCCE Master Gardeners class on "Berries." The class is offered at no charge on Saturday, October 16th and starts at 9 a.m. It will be held in the Veterans

Memorial Building at 130 Placerville Dr. in Placerville. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at [http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master Gardener/](http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Gardener/).