



Grow up!
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Isn't it about time, after all? Consider expanding your horticultural horizons. Elevate your gardening game! Exploit verticality in the vegetable kingdom... Growing up, in other words, is a good thing.

There are lots of reasons for finally growing up. It can maximize your garden space. It can add interest, variety and texture to your landscape overall. Growing up will provide new areas of welcome shade for man and beast, plus shelter for shade plants. Growing veggies on upright structures makes weeding easier and harvesting a snap (no more blind groping thru the sprawling vines among creepy, crawly or biting thingies). Your cucumbers will straighten themselves out. Air circulation is improved thereby foiling fatal fungi.

Not enough room for fruit trees, you say? Try espalier (which is the fancy French term for growing up) against a fence. Many different trees can be treated in this way -- pear, apples and citrus. It's not rocket science: check out University of California ANR publication 8502 (<http://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8502.pdf>) to get started.

What can be used to encourage upward mobility in plants? Most everybody has tried the classic teepee made with poles to support beans or peas. Homemade or store bought trellises are common props for climbing roses and other ornamental vines. But why limit yourself? There are dozens of other support systems, many are re-used and re-purposed objects that are free or low cost. Perhaps some of you readers have visited the Getty Center museum in LA? Did you notice the absolutely elegant version of teepees made with re-bar?

Wooden pallets are so very trendy these days -- used for furniture, fencing, planter boxes, and more. But have you tried the wall-mount pallet planter? It's simply a pallet with bottom boards added to each "rung" to create narrow planting pockets. Given a coat of rustic paint, these are

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wonderful filled with succulents and mounted on an exterior wall. Just google 'pallet wall planter' and find lots of plans.

Got any rickety old ladders? The tripod "orchard" type makes excellent temporary supports for squash, melons and cucumbers. At the end of the season, simply fold and store. (Remember: safety first! Do not climb the ladder to pluck the highest gourd!)

Got to love those hog wire panels: 3 foot by 6 foot, large grid, made with beefy steel (think about restraining a large pig). They work well as stand-alone backup for bush peas or beans. Leaned together, they can make a great A-frame domicile for vines. They look especially nice when treated with muriatic acid to give a rusty patina.

Poke around in thrift shops, the Habitat Re-store and other recycled building materials stores for old metal bedsteads, gates, and even mattress springs. And ... wait! Don't throw out that pop-up tent frame! The tent covering wears out long before the metal framework. It's light weight, mobile, and can be used for a temporary arbor.

Some plants can serve as play structures for other plants. We're reminded that the Navajo planted the 3 sisters together: corn served as the support for climbing beans, and squash twined around the bottom suppressing weeds and shading the soil. Talk about efficient use of water and space! Currently in a garden close to us, a willful Armenian cucumber has scorned the trellis provided. It prefers clambering up into an adjacent 9 foot tall fennel-plant-gone-to-seed. Of course, many of you will shudder at the idea of rusty fence bits and bed springs as garden décor. For the more fastidious, building a permanent arbor may be the way to go. Make it sturdy and you can grow grapes, wisteria, or kiwis -- and have a great shady spot to sit, as well. An example of Extreme Growing Up can be viewed atop Placerville Fire Station #25. Four tubes placed on the roof by Case Made Foundation show how veggies can be grown in unexpected/unused spaces.

There are a few pitfalls to growing up. The beans at the top of a tall teepee are way out of reach of this dwarfish gardener. Structures must be sturdy and anchored to handle the weight of the plant and windy conditions. But, also remember that crops should be rotated from spot to spot in the vegetable garden. Use portable, collapsible or temporary support systems that permit you to grow your tomatoes or beans in different beds on subsequent years. Spoiler alert! Permanent plantings of vines or trees against fences will require assertive annual pruning to keep them civilized.

The advantages of verticality far outweigh the disadvantages... Up, up and away!

Join UCCE Master Gardeners Walt Miller and Pam Lane for this Saturday's free public education class on planting fruit trees. The 9:00 a.m. to noon class will cover all the in's and out's for growing successful fruit trees in our varied climate. Class is at Folsom Lake College El Dorado Center, Room A-105 and in the adjoining Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive, Placerville CA.

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UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.