



Designing Gardens for Small Spaces  
By Dawn Modena  
UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

Small areas can provide big opportunities to create stunning garden spaces. Often overlooked, a tiny place such as a balcony, patio, window ledge, beside a walkway, or the area around a mailbox could be turned into a colorful, functional, and peaceful garden. Using a few key principles will help create a great impact in a small space:

1. Assess your space

The first step is to answer some questions to understand your space and your goals for the garden. Is the area in full sunlight all day or is it shady? Does it already have great soil or will you need containers? How do you want to use the garden? Will you grow food, create a space to sit and relax, or is color and fragrance your priority? Let the answers to these questions inform and direct your design and plant selection.

2. Maximize your space

One of the most effective ways to maximize a small space is to go vertical. Many small spaces have a wall or a fence that can be used as a support for growing vines, espaliered trees or attaching individual wall hung containers. Even without a wall, there are endless creative ways to add height in the garden. Build a trellis or arbor for vines to grow on. Hang planters from eaves or decorative stakes. Planting in containers of different heights is also a good way to create visual layers in the garden. Use stairs, ladders, chairs, tables, or shelves as platforms for containers. What unique ideas can you use to grow vertically in your small garden space?

February 28, 2018

### 3. Plant selection

Another way to get the most from a small space is by choosing plants that pull double duty. Consider plants that are both attractive and edible, such as herbs, kale, artichokes, swiss chard, sunflowers, and strawberries. Plants with an upright shape instead of ones that spread out horizontally also help to conserve space. Some edible examples are chives, shallots, leeks, aloe vera, rhubarb, and celery. Choices that provide height and color while also attracting pollinators include clematis, jasmine, yarrow, and hollyhock.

When choosing trees or shrubs, look for slow growers with a compact shape and interesting foliage or colorful blooms. Dwarf varieties of fruit trees are well suited for small gardens. These can be grown in containers and should be pruned regularly to maintain the desired shape and size.

### 4. Color scheme and a focal point

A random assortment of colors can look cluttered and make a small space seem even more confined. Instead, choose a few complimentary colors to use throughout the garden for a cohesive, streamlined look.

Include a focal point to bring the design together and give the eye a place to focus. This could be a bench, a fountain, a statue, or a piece of artwork. It could also be a single eye-catching plant that makes a visual statement like a small Japanese maple or red twig dogwood. Use your imagination and include something you really enjoy as a focal point in your garden.

This weeks class has been **canceled** due to bad weather. The **good news** is it has been **re-scheduled** for Wednesday, August 8th at the Cameron Park Community Center. Master Gardener Mike Pavlick will present a public education class on “Gardening for Small Spaces” on March 3 at Government Center, Bldg C – Hearing Room, Placerville. Site location, raised bed options, container gardening, and other methods which allow anyone to have a vegetable garden in a small backyard setting will be covered at this free event.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). 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://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at [http://ucanr.edu/master\\_gardener\\_e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). You can also find us on Facebook.