

# City&Town

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# Sustaining a working garden

We look at the delicious side of being an Eco Warrior. Growing your own produce can help the environment, your pocket and it tastes a lot better

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“ **F**ew activities during the gardening year are quite as satisfying and rewarding as growing your own fruit and vegetables. Certainly home-grown produce will always be fresher and should taste better than the equivalent produce purchased at the local store or supermarket; it will also cost you a good deal less. Aside from these obvious benefits, working a garden to produce your own fruit and vegetables has other advantages, not just for the grower but also for the environment.

In the case of home-grown produce, quality and flavour are rarely compromised for yield results and in such circumstances the grower would be familiar with the growth process and, most importantly, what fertilisers and pesticides were during the process and what preservatives were used after harvesting. Home-grown produce also costs a great deal less, offering environmental savings on energy and transport costs. In today's increasingly eco-conscious world, that's a win-win for all concerned.

Does size matter? Not really, because fruit and vegetables can be grown in all sorts of sizes. Some varieties prefer specific growing conditions, but otherwise one can start a working garden on the window sill, a patio container or even within the planted border. Some may need to be grown in a greenhouse, but others can be grown in the shade. Such is the choice now that you can grow vegetables all year round.

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ties and discover what grows well in your soil. Some mistakes may occur along the way, but the joy is surely the success of discovering, through a process of trial and error, what grows best for you.

Getting started requires getting organised. You need to become familiar with crop rotation to ensure optimum results and minimise any losses caused by pests and diseases. You can grow vegetables in rows in a number of ways. Owners of smaller sites should learn the benefits the deep-bed system, which is used to grow more produce in the space available and is a popular and very successful method used to boost productivity.

The deep-bed system is especially useful in sites of poorer soil quality and typically involves double digging an area approx 1200mm wide, and adding plenty of manure/soil conditioner to raise the level at least 150-200mm. Edging the beds with boards makes for a neater finish; this raised-bed structure will be familiar to many readers. This method of site preparation and growing offers several advantages over the traditional methods of growing in rows. It increases soil fertility and improves drainage. It results in less freezing during winter months and allows the soil to warm more quickly in spring months, facilitating better root development and closer crop growth. This then leads to significantly improved yields over more traditional methods.

Growing fruit is also a rewarding aspect of working in the garden. However, to ensure good crop yields, you need to do detailed planning and preparation before deciding which fruit to grow. Site selection is also very important; fruit trees require fertile,



## Which Vegetable Where?

### Vegetables for Containers

- ▣ Carrots
- ▣ Dwarf French Beans
- ▣ Onion (Spring or Salad)
- ▣ Tomatoes

### Compact Popular Vegetables

- ▣ Broad Bean (The Sutton)
- ▣ Brussels Sprout (Peer Gynt)
- ▣ Cabbage (Hispi)
- ▣ Lettuce (Tom Thumb)

### Highly Productive Vegetables

- ▣ Climbing French Beans
- ▣ Courgettes
- ▣ Peas (Edible-podded) or Sugar Snap
- ▣ Runner Beans

### Vegetables for the Greenhouse

- ▣ Cucumber
- ▣ Lettuce (Winter)
- ▣ Sweet Peppers
- ▣ Tomatoes

well-drained sunny sites to flourish and shade should be avoided. Because they require lots of water, fruit trees must be planted near or within access to water.

Herb gardens are very popular today. For centuries, herbs have been grown for many purposes including culinary and medicinal. They are also a very popular choice for scent. Being a very versatile plant, herbs can be found in most suburban gardens happily growing amongst other popular shrub and herbaceous perennials. Herbs are also very easy to grow.

Traditional herb gardens were a very complex affair of elaborate geometric shapes which facilitated the partitioning of different varieties and typically bordered with tightly cut Box (*Buxus*) hedging. In smaller spaces, herbs can be grown in containers (herb wheels) or grown collectively as large or small clusters known as "herb gardens". These are usually located near the house or kitchen. If you wish to build a herb garden, choose a free-draining sunny site. Avoid heavy clay conditions. If necessary, you can use the deep-bed system for growing herbs. Like vegetables, many herbs can be raised from seed but be careful and avoid the large spreading types. Popular culinary herbs include basil, chive, fennel, marjoram, thyme, rosemary and sage.

Towards a more eco-friendly garden

We all have a duty to be more eco-friendly. This includes our approach to gardening activities. Simple tasks to be more environmental include choosing peat-free soil conditioners. Using a water butt to catch and store rain water is

an invaluable water resource for the garden. Soil fertility is greatly enhanced by regular additions of composted organic matter. Every garden requires two composters, but composters need not resemble the typical waste bin. Instead why not choose a composter that is designed to blend in as a garden feature. For example, the Beehive Composter is aesthetically pleasing because it looks like a normal beehive. Constructed from Mahogany WBP ply and with a very high level of workmanship and finishing, it can also be used as a Garden Tool Tidy or indeed simply as a novel feature.

Lighting your garden can be costly to both your electricity bill and the environment. We recommend Compact Fluorescent lighting (CFL) or LED lighting, which are two excellent ways of providing energy-efficient lighting in today's garden.

Owen Chubb is Director of Owen Chubb Garden Landscapes Limited, based in Rathfarnham, Dublin 14. This is an established and award-winning landscaping company, which offers clients a complete landscaping service including garden design, construction and planting. The company is a full member of the Association of Landscape Contractors of Ireland (ALCI), the professional association for landscaping contractors and, in 2005 and 2006, won the prestigious ALCI Awards for BEST PRIVATE GARDEN Design & Construction. Tel 087-206 128 / 01-492 0904 [www.owenchubblandscapers.com](http://www.owenchubblandscapers.com)