

Squeezing the most out of small outdoor spaces



This undated photo provided by Janice Parker shows an outdoor garden in Connecticut designed by Parker, a landscape architect. To make the most of small outdoor spaces, Parker recommends using one large, dramatic planter rather than several smaller ones. (Neil Landino Jr./Janice Parker via AP)

By **Melissa Rayworth** | AP April 3 at 11:22 AM

As herb and vegetable gardens, composting and other aspects of green living become more popular, many people with limited outdoor space are looking for ways to squeeze the most out of it.

“A client in a modern high-rise in downtown Chicago did not have a typical garden per se, but did have a large outdoor balcony with a beautiful view,” says interior designer Edyta Czajkowska, founder of the Chicago design firm Edyta & Co. “We created a garden space for her by using planters in varying sizes that she could plant flowers and herbs in. We stuck to one plant per planter, which created an organic yet tailored look, while still elevating something as simple as garlic or chives.”

Even a small patio or balcony can be made useful and plant-friendly, interior designers say.

Here, Czajkowska and two other experts — Connecticut landscape architect and designer Janice Parker, and Atlanta interior designer Jen Sypeck — offer advice on creating a lush and plant-friendly area even in a tiny space.

MAP OUT YOUR PLAN

Assess your space realistically, says Czajkowska, and then seek inspiration at a home and garden store or on Pinterest.

Decide what your goals are. Do you want to fill the space with beautiful blooms, cutting some for indoor flower arrangements throughout the summer? Or would you love to grow an ample crop of herbs for cooking or become a composter? Once you choose, get creative.

“A vertical garden is a great option for smaller spaces as it only utilizes wall space, and you can actually plant quite a bit in it,” Czajkowska says. “Just like with small interior spaces, you’d be surprised at what you can fit into a space that’s well thought out.”

As you plan, consider which tools or equipment you’ll need for gardening or other outdoor work. One space-saving solution: For seating, choose closed benches with storage space inside.

CHOOSE PLANTS STRATEGICALLY

If you’re a first-time gardener, Sypeck says, “start with a hardy plant like rosemary or lavender. Both of these beauties offer a statement moment, an ornamental element, aromatic benefits and are hard to kill.”

Another good option is buying pre-made container gardens with plants and flowers that work together. “Chances are a garden expert paired everything with similar needs,” she says. “That way, you can water accordingly and provide the correct amount of sunlight needed.”

For vivid color without too much effort, consider a pre-planted container of succulents such as cheveria, kalanchoe and sedum. They’re hardy, Sypeck says, “but they don’t look like it, as they produce vibrant colors and flowers. When paired together, they create a striking container garden, with the same care requirements.”

If you want color and beauty during the warm season, Parker says, “stick with annuals for high impact color from May to October.”

If your outdoor space doesn’t get much sun, choose plants that do well in the shade.

And in a limited space, “choose plants that grow slowly and keep their form,” Parker says, like boxwood roses or Japanese maples.

EMBRACE COLOR AND DRAMA

In a small space, Parker says, don't be afraid to go big. For example, instead of planting herbs or flowers in small planters, choose one large and dramatic planter as a design statement.

She and Sypeck say there are many beautiful, lightweight planters available made with a mix of fiberglass and zinc or bronze, so you can create a dramatic look that's safe to use on rooftops or balconies where weight is an issue.

"I personally love mixing materials and styles with my outdoor containers," Sypeck says. "Layering with a variety of heights and textures is my approach, and I tend to favor copper, cement and stone, all with a soft, modern sensibility."

She also recommends repurposing unexpected items as eye-catching containers: "An old copper ice bucket was one of my latest victims turned into a now thriving succulent garden," she says. "I've also been known to spray paint a pot or two if I'm craving a new color and vibe."

Even a small composting bin can be hidden inside an attractive planter, helping that practical item blend well into an outdoor living space.

Earth tones work well for planters, Parker says, but "one wonderful brightly colored planter can be terrific" too.

MAKE OTHER DETAILS COUNT

Think of a balcony or small patio as an outdoor room, Parker suggests. Choose a beautiful table as a focal point, even if it's small and will have plants on it.

Also consider lighting, and how the space will look and feel at night, as well as during the day. If the outdoor space doesn't have electricity, no problem. Use LED candles or battery-powered lights clustered around the space.

"Outdoor lighting will really create a sense of intimacy," Parker says, "and welcome you out into the space."

As a finishing touch, add a sculpture or other item — like a decorative birdcage painted a bright color — amid your plants.

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