

Steven Biggs

Helping home gardeners grow good food



20 SMALL-SPACE FOOD-GARDEN HACKS

Gardening is a creative act. Be creative, have fun—and bend the rules so you can grow more food.

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BEND THE RULES!

Don't grow food by the book! **Be creative and have fun.**

Here are 20 hacks to help you fit in more vegetables, fruit, herbs, and edible flowers... whether you have an acreage, small yard, or balcony!

1

Question the Rules

FORGET PERFECTION

You probably don't have the ideal conditions for some crops. Maybe your soil isn't the best...maybe you don't have enough sun. If you were a commercial market gardener, this would matter. But if you're a home gardener, figure out how to make the best of what you have. I grow tomatoes on my driveway, in less than 6 hours of sunlight. I get A LOT of tomatoes from space that would otherwise go unused. Sure, it's fewer tomatoes than if I had full sun on my driveway. But it's more than I'd get if I didn't grow there! *Gardening is a great cure for perfectionism.*

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Question the Rules

CHEAT ON PLANT SPACING

Challenge the recommended spacing on seed packets and plant labels. I always sow carrots, lettuce, and beet seeds more densely than recommended...and then thin them out as they begin to grow, enjoying baby carrots, lettuce, and beets as I do.



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Waste Less

PLANT TWO CROPS TOGETHER

Waste less **space**! Plant fast- and slow-germinating seeds in the same space. My favourite combo is carrots and radishes. Carrots are slow to germinate; radishes are fast. You'll be harvesting full-grown radishes just as your carrot seedlings need more space. As you pull out the radishes, you give the carrots more space. (Pulling out the radishes, which have taproots, also loosens the soil for your carrot seedlings!)



**Waste
Less**

PLANT CONTINUOUSLY

Don't waste growing **time**. Start as early as possible in the spring with cold-hardy crops. As your crops mature, plant new crops in the same space, so that the space is growing food as long as possible. Don't forget to grow cold-hardy crops in the fall to overwinter in cold frames and harvest all winter long.

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Waste Less

EAT OTHER PARTS OF THE PLANT

Don't waste **what's edible**. Many plants have more than one edible part. Growing beets? Then eat the leaves, which are like chard. Garlic makes "scapes" that are edible and sought after by gourmet chefs! Radishes? Try the crunchy, peppery seed pods. This year my daughter made pesto from young radish leaves...who knew?



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Grow Vertically

TIER YOUR GARDEN WITH CONTAINERS

Think of your garden as a layer cake.

Plants that might be out-competed or shaded in the bottom layer might do very well if raised up a layer by planting them in a container.



Grow Vertically

PAIR UP SUN-LOVERS AND SHADE-LOVERS

If you have staked tomato plants, there can be a lot of unused ground around them. Sprinkle lettuce seeds for a late summer lettuce crop...the lettuce will be glad of some shade in the heat of summer.

Or, make an a-frame for growing cucumbers, and plant leafy greens in the shade below.

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Grow Vertically

REMEMBER FENCES AND WALLS

Use fences for training vining crops. And don't forget that the top of a fence can be dressed up with a planter box. An empty fence or wall is a wasted opportunity!



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Grow Vertically

BUILD VERTICAL STRUCTURES IN YOUR GARDEN

I've seen watermelons growing on A-frames, each melon supported by a sling!

My neighbour Joe has a 10-foot-high wall of pole beans around his yard...an edible wall.

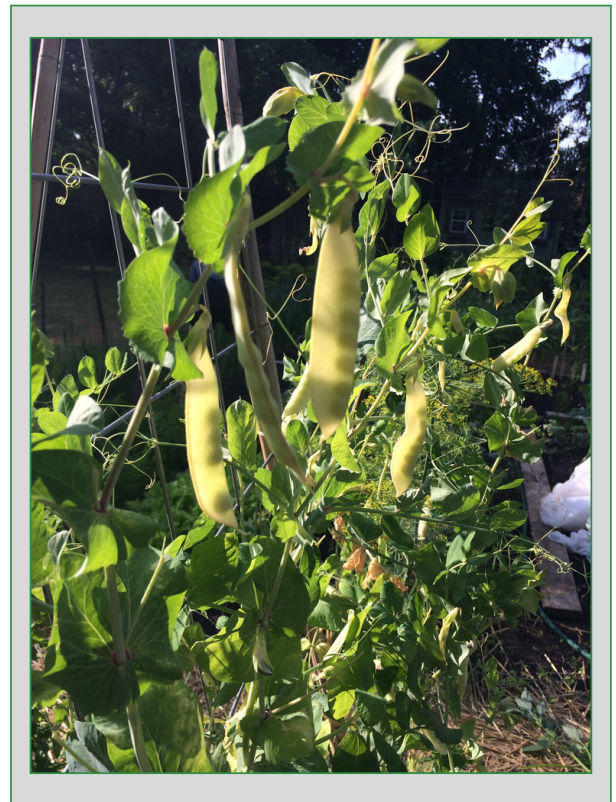


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Grow Vertically

CHOOSE VINING VARIETIES

Some plants, such as peas, beans, and squash, are available in both vining and bush forms. Fit more into the same space by growing vertically, using vining crops and vining varieties..





Repurpose Space

REARRANGE GARDEN PATHWAYS

Garden pathways take up a lot of potential growing space. Think about growing in blocks instead of skinny rows with pathways in between.

Next, think about how to minimize space used for pathways by making some of your pathways dead-end.

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Repurpose Space

REMEMBER STAIRS

Got steps up to a porch, deck, or doorway?

If the stairs are wide enough, maybe there is enough space for potted plants along one side.

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Repurpose Space

MAKE THE MOST OF DRIVEWAYS

If you have more driveway than car, you have growing space going to waste. You don't need to remove a driveway to cultivate the space. Containers are a great option. We've turned half of our driveway into a tomato patch every summer with a temporary straw-bale garden.



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Repurpose Space

WEAVE IN A FEW MORE CONTAINERS

There's often space for even more potted plants, whether on a deck, patio, or the edge of a walkway.



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Repurpose Space

TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT ROOFTOPS

Do you have a flat roof? Or maybe a shed? I recently heard from someone who made a new shed, and put a garden on the shed roof.



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Repurpose Space

GROW AN EDIBLE LAWN

You can't beat a colourful thyme lawn in bloom!
Low-growing herbs are a great option for low-traffic areas. Or, how about a mowable chamomile lawn?



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Use the Existing Landscape

USE TREES AND SHRUBS

One year, a vining summer squash grew up one of my spruce trees—a great use of space. Another year, squash grew along the cedar hedge, which was studded with a dozen squash at harvest time. Some years the runner beans grow into the old apple tree above my bean teepee...and the scarlett bean flowers look really nice alongside apples!

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Use the Existing Landscape

GROW ON THE COMPOSTER

Turn a compost pile into a temporary garden by putting a layer of soil on top. It's a great place to grow squash and zucchini, which elbow-out other plants in the garden.



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Use the Existing Landscape

MIX UP EXISTING PLANTINGS

If your landscape is ornamental, think about weaving in edible plants. Maybe some low berry bushes. Or, beautiful asparagus ferns at the back of a perennial bed. Hint hint...what about the front yard? Or choose edible flowers for your annual bedding plants.



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Use the Existing Landscape

OUTSMART TREE ROOTS

Tree roots are the bane of many gardeners. When growing a crop near a big tree or beside a hedge, don't waste time constantly digging out roots.

Instead, make a container garden above the ground that is chock-full of tree and shrub roots.



STEVEN BIGGS

FOUNDER, FOOD GARDEN LIFE MEDIA

Recognized by Garden Making magazine as one of the “green gang” making a difference in horticulture, Steven’s passion is helping people grow food. His own Toronto yard includes a driveway straw-bale garden, rooftop kitchen garden, wicking beds, and an edible-themed front yard. In his work as a horticulturist, horticulture instructor, broadcaster, and author, he helps people take a creative approach to gardening so that it suits their situation. Steven produces and hosts The Food Garden Life Show and runs the foodgardenlife.com blog about growing food in home gardens.

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DIG DEEPER

Container Vegetable Gardening Masterclass

Everything you need to know for container vegetable gardening success! This self-paced masterclass gives you top crops, container ideas, and setup and care essentials. AND find out how to make wicking beds, sub-irrigated planters, and straw-bale gardens.



Online courses about growing figs, lemons, fruit, and more at [FoodGardenLife.com](https://www.FoodGardenLife.com)