

IT'S *Spring* GARDENING TIME

Patio gardens can blossom

By Darla Welles
Copley News Service

When Tom Champlin and his wife, Marian, moved into a condominium a few years ago, they left behind a home with a lushly planted yard.

So it was understandable that he would not long tolerate the bleakness of the condominium's small patio, which consisted of a patch of concrete bordered by dirt.

"I didn't like to sit out here with the sun glaring on the concrete and nothing green or pretty," Champlin said.

He covered the concrete with green outdoor carpeting, filled the dirt border with hearty creeping charlie and filled containers with green and blooming plants.

Champlin selected plants that are easy to grow and take little care. He chose shade-loving Boston ferns for hanging planters in the sheltered area of the patio, and sun-loving annuals and perennials for planter boxes that he put on the open ledge of the patio wall. He added night-blooming jasmine for fragrance and easy-care flowering cactus plants for winter bloom.

Champlin's easy-care approach is but one way to beautify the small patio and deck areas found in condominium and apartment complexes.

Gardening in these small spaces can be as simple or as elaborate as the individual gardener's patience allows. The finished product can vary as widely as the gardeners themselves.

Patio plantings can be inexpensive, relying on common flowers that can be grown from seed or from small plants that can be bought in pony packs of six each, usually for no more than a dollar a pack.

The least expensive containers are simple clay pots, said Bruce

Asakawa, owner of a garden center. The most durable, but more costly, are redwood tubs or boxes.

Also good for larger plantings are oak barrels split in half to form tubs.

"You can really do a lot in a small patio area," Asakawa said.

"You can successfully plant almost anything except really large or fast-growing plants in containers. So the appearance of a patio garden is really only limited by the imagination and patience of the person doing it.

"Some people don't have the patience to start plants from seed. For them the pony packs of plants or small plants in 4- or 6-inch pots are perfect. Colorful annual flowers will bloom all through summer and into the autumn if you keep pinching off the dead blooms.

"Perennial plants like marguerite daisies usually need to be pruned back during the cool season to keep them from getting leggy and woody, but they're very good container plants for plentiful bloom and color."

Geraniums are available in many varieties. Some varieties grow upright and are good for planter boxes; others trail and are good for hanging baskets. Their blooms and leaves take many forms and they are tolerant plants that thrive even when occasionally neglected, Asakawa said.

For shaded areas and hanging baskets, Asakawa recommends impatiens, begonias and ferns.

Also good for color are plants grown from bulbs or tubers — crocus, hyacinths, daffodils, iris and ranunculus.

Cactus and succulents, like jade plant and aloe, require little care and can offer interesting shapes and unusual blooms.

Many shrubs — flowering varieties like azaleas, camellias and lantana — adapt well to container growing, as do some slow-growing trees like star pine or ficus.



Copley News Service photo

Patio plants

This patio incorporates several methods for growing plants in small areas.

Plan garden on paper initially

By Patrick Denton
Copley News Service

When planning our family's various garden beds, I find it a great help to look at my garden journal. In it I keep "idea" pages that contain notations of pleasing plantings that I've seen in someone else's garden, or in a picture or a display garden.

As I'm drawing or writing up the plantings for different sections of my garden, I can incorporate some of these ideas right into my plans.

Some of my ideas are: a bed of light pink astilbes and white candytuft; dark opal basil with white and red fibrous begonias; a bed of purple petunias dotted with red geranium accent plants and edged with lemon drop marigolds; blue salvia edged with dwarf yellow marigolds; sweet peas edged with annual baby's breath.

Of course, a gardener's choice of flowers is a highly personalized one. I only can say what would please me. There's no substitute for a property owner going out himself and scouting out what sorts of shapes and colors give him pleasure.

When drawing up a plan for a vegetable garden, sketch the area and mark the north, south, east and west sides. Then, alongside the sketch of the bed, make a list of the vegetables you wish to grow, in order of preference.

Now you are ready to sketch in blocks of plantings. If you are starting a new garden, the first thing to think about is the permanent plantings like asparagus and

rhubarb.

If you wish to incorporate any of these into your garden plan, they should be sketched in along an edge of the plot where they can remain undisturbed. Asparagus should be given full sun, while the rhubarb will tolerate some shade.

As for all permanent plantings, the soil where they will be planted must be deeply dug and well enriched with manure, compost or any rich organic matter you can get your hands on.

Next, turn your attention to the taller of the vegetables you have chosen — the corn, pole beans, trellised cucumbers and staked tomatoes. These should be placed at the north end of the vegetable bed, where they won't shade the other vegetables.

I like to plant my rows running east and west, contrary to most directions given in garden books. I feel the plants receive better sunlight exposure when the rows follow the path of the sun as it rolls across the sky from east to west each day.

As you move from the north end of your plan down toward the south end, you will be incorporating blocks of your favorite vegetable. Try to keep the root vegetables together, the peas and beans together, and the cabbage-family vegetables together, as this facilitates rotation of crops for best use of soil nutrients.

At the southern edge of the vegetable garden you may wish to set the whole thing off with a flower border or a border of herbs, which can be very decorative.

Garden tips

American plant breeder Luther Burbank (1849-1926) had a talent for improvising. For example, he made as many as 500 grafts on a single plum tree and speeded growth by inserting wedge-ended cuttings into the tops of the host tree's branches.

Other growers grafted branches to a limb sawed off near the trunk — and waited twice as long for

results.

Earthworms eat the dirt they live in, or at least the edible leaf bits, soil bacteria and insects that live in dirt.

Worms' castings, the material they excrete, contain five times as much nitrogen, seven times as much phosphorous, 11 times as much potash and three times as much magnesium as dirt.

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