

Gardening within a Garden

by Dede Moreno

A small garden within a larger garden offers a creative opportunity for novices and seasoned gardeners alike. You may be lulled out of the winter doldrums if you have a small container garden close to the house where you can work on colder days. A small garden also lends interest to your landscaped yard by creating a focal point. Add a personal touch by selecting a theme that is unique, artistic or fun.

Small containers can be arranged in ways that you may have seen in a book, magazine or someone else's house. In order to save money, try to find existing containers in your yard or house, or go to yard sales and thrift stores. Maybe you have always wanted a Tuscan landscape but you live in the snow. Use old tomato sauce cans, coffee cans or olive oil containers to plant herbs, or other plants and arrange them in an artistic arrangement on a deck.

Placing containers of plants in an already existing garden adds some interest. Use them to jazz up a tired garden at the end of summer or spruce up a brown space as winter comes to an end. Work with colors and textures of plants to go with the container or planting area. Slow-growing conifers, for instance, provide structure and texture to small gardens. An example, *juniperus horizontalis* 'Mother Lode', has golden foliage from spring through fall, turning rich shades of amber and bronze for winter.

Try some unusual combinations of plants in a variety of containers and stack them. Ferns, poppies, Russian sage and purple fountain grass are good choices for varieties of texture and color. You can create a vegetable or herb garden in stacking pots. Fill a large pot with peanuts from packing boxes and soil. Place a few slats of wood across the container to support the next pot then place the next pot on top. You can stack several containers on top on each other, depending upon the size of the containers. Fill them with potting soil and plant around each stacking container. A good rule of thumb to follow for container planting is to use plants that survive in two zones colder than the zone you live in. For the Mother Lode, these would be plants that are cold hardy to Zone 5.

According to University of Illinois Extension Service, plants take on an entirely new life when planted in containers. They may grow faster in large containers or slower in small containers.

Small gardens aren't necessarily restricted to containers. Miniature landscapes can be created when any space is transformed with objects, plants and lights. There are many new solar lights that come in an array of colors. The use of solar lights allows for a garden to illuminate some night-blooming plants.

A garden within a garden is a chance to try something new on a small scale. If you use containers, make sure they will provide ample room for the plants to grow. Also,

make sure they have good drainage so the plants aren't susceptible to root rot or Verticillium wilt. Elevate the containers with "pot feet" to allow for good drainage and air circulation. This miniature garden you have created will add zest to the larger landscape and give your garden a face life with more texture and structure.