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Tips for the tomato connoisseur

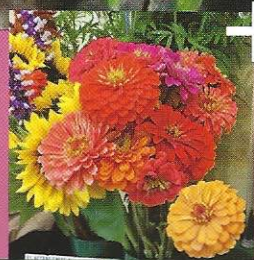
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Iowa GARDENER

IOWA'S OWN GUIDE TO GREAT GARDENING & LANDSCAPING **MAGAZINE**

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Vertical Gardening

Save space, repurpose, and add beauty.

By Rita Perea

Have you ever wished you had more space for growing flowers or vegetables, but thought it impossible because you live on a small lot or in a high-rise condo building? Or maybe you have a large deep-shade yard, where the only sunny spot is on your front porch, and thought you couldn't possibly have a garden. Here's some good news: You can use vertical gardening to grow both flowers and edibles to maximize your small spaces. Your creativity in the use of materials can blossom as much as your plants.

As the name implies, vertical gardening means growing plants upward on a support structure. From tomato cages, to wooden stakes, metal trellises, and fabric pockets secured to the wall, there are many techniques and benefits of gardening vertically.

Growing plants up instead of out is not only space saving, it also maximizes yields in smaller areas. Many more flowers, vegetables, and herbs can be grown vertically rather than horizontally, which supports self-sustainability practices. It is so rewarding to walk out to your front porch, pick a cherry tomato that you've grown in a pot and pop it into your mouth. With increased air flow around plants grown vertically, you will see a decrease in diseases and pests. A bonus benefit from gardening up is saving not only space, but time. It is more efficient to care for a vertical garden because the plants are all clustered together. This also means less bending and other strenuous garden activity, making more time enjoying the garden.

IMAGINATIVE SUPPORTS

There are many structures to choose from for growing plants vertically, limited only by your imagination. Items can be purchased at a garden center or repurposed found objects. Part of the fun is to be creative when thinking about which structures you might want to use to create your vertical garden.





▲ A stunning 'William Baffin' climbing rose (*Rosa* 'William Baffin') hugs an arbor while a nearby string of colorful ornaments add more vertical interest in this urban garden.

◀ Treasures repurposed as vertical gardening structures are as close as your bedroom closet. An inexpensive shoe organizer was planted with pink vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*) and secured to a wooden trellis to dress up a small space.

➤ Growing 'Blondkopfchen' heirloom cherry tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum* 'Blondkopfchen') supported by a tomato cage in a container on a sunny deck is a tried and true method of growing up.

The goals of your vertical garden and the amount of sun, wind, and ease of irrigation will dictate what kind of structures to select. It is a good idea to start small, selecting one area of your space for vertical gardening. You are not limited to just the outdoor spaces.

Add vertical beauty and function to indoor walls, too. The best structures for houseplants, herbs, and indoor beauty are those that won't drip when watered. Dripping water could possibly create mold or ruin walls. Clear glass containers or colorful plastic pots manufactured to be attached to an indoor wall will ensure no water problems.

Living walls have molded plastic plant pockets designed to be displayed either in- or outdoors. The modular planting systems can be used



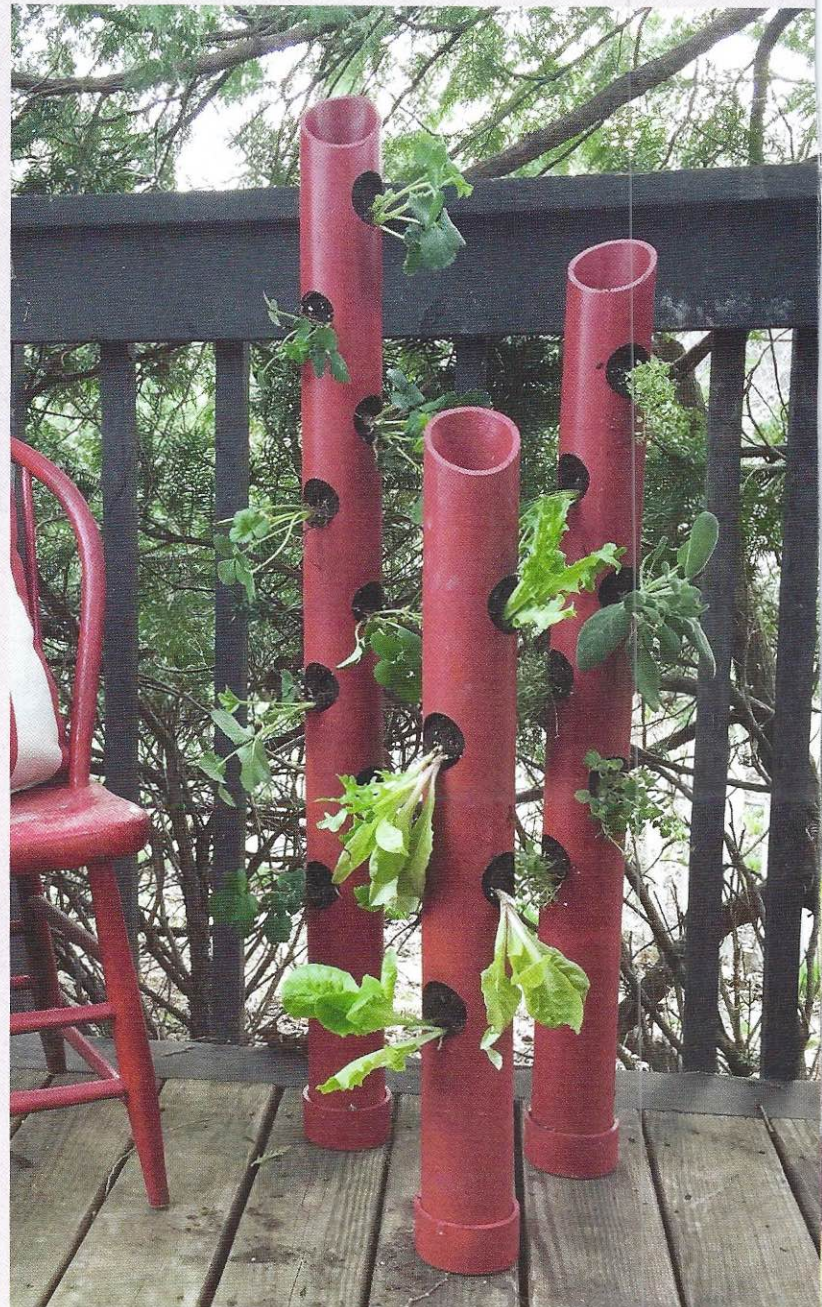
Make Your Own

"One of the newest trends I've seen is the use of PVC pipe to grow lettuce and strawberries vertically. It's pretty easy to do," said Sand Runkel of Ted Lare Garden Center in Cumming, Iowa. Runkel teaches a class on how to repurpose the pipe as a planting container. Here's a modification of his instructions.

- Take a new piece of 3-inch diameter PVC pipe, any length. Use a hacksaw to cut the pipe at an angle in staggered lengths. Drill holes in a pipe cap for drainage.

- With a saw-hole bit, drill holes in the pipes for planting. Paint the pipes, if desired.
- Add small rocks at the bottom of the pipe to give it stability.
- Turn the pipe so it stands up vertically and fill it to the top with organic potting mix.
- Put your plants or seeds in the holes and water them in.

"You can even plant a few in the opening at the top," Runkel said. "It's a great way to increase plant production, and it's cool to see all of the pipes standing up together."



Left: Building a vertical garden for edibles from new PVC pipe is a fun project. To add visual interest, three 3-inch diameter pipes were cut at an angle at the top and at staggered lengths with a hacksaw. Holes for drainage were drilled in the flat-bottom pipe caps. Next, a saw-hole drill bit was used to place the side holes for the plants into the pipe. The pipes were painted for color. After assembly, small rocks were placed in the bottom of each pipe to provide stability and aid drainage.

Right: Filled with organic potting soil and planted with strawberry plants (tallest), a variety of herbs (medium) and an assortment of lettuces (shortest), this edible vertical garden grouping adds visual impact as well as function to a small patio space.

as one small section of six to eight plants or as multiples placed together to create a high-density wall art. Fill the plastic pockets with herbs or houseplants for indoors, and herbs, annuals, succulents, and ferns outdoors. It is quite a conversation piece when your dinner guests see the wall of fresh herbs growing next to your kitchen.

MULTIPURPOSE SUPPORTS

Whether you are using vertical gardening for form, to add beauty and interest, or for function, the same structures can be used for more than one purpose.

In addition to a modular living wall container, consider using the popular wooly pocket outdoors. Made of a coated wool fiber, wooly pockets offer three to nine (or more) side-by-side plant pockets that can be attached to an outdoor wall, fence, or garden gate. Several wooly pockets can be placed in vertical rows on an exterior or garage wall and planted with herbs or flowers to provide interest, texture, form, and function to an unused space.

Growing vegetables in containers on a deck or front porch is another tried-and-true method of vertical gardening. Cages, twine, or other supports work for cherry tomatoes and vining

▼ On the right, framed succulents in living-wall vertical boxes add simple beauty and elegance to this outdoor living space.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RITA PEREA.



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◀ Modular Living Wall plant pockets are easy for DIY gardeners to tend. Homeowner Ernest Perea admires the herbs he has planted, including (top to bottom): Mojito mint (*Mentha x villosa*), 'Tuscan Blue' rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Tuscan Blue'), Mini-Blue English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia* 'Mini Blue'), Greek oregano (*Origanum vulgare*), and variegated lemon thyme (*Thymus x citriodorus* 'Variegata').

✦ Consider repurposing a fountain that no longer functions, but still has character. Plantings include 'Sweet Caroline' lime green sweetpotato vines (*Ipomoea batatas* 'Sweet Caroline'), 'Obsession Red' verbena (*V. 'Obsession Red'*), and 'Supercascade Red' petunia (*P. x hybrida*) cascade over the fountain walls. Containers hold assorted verbena and 'Lime Green' flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*).

vegetable plants, such as beans, peas, and cucumbers. Sensitive to small-space consumer needs, plant breeders have introduced new, vegetable varieties developed solely for patio, pots, and front-porch gardening.

Consider annuals or perennials for interest and texture in your vertical garden, and plants that naturally like to trail, such as sweetpotato vine, or climb, such as mandevilla. Vining clematis, a woody perennial, comes in many different varieties, colors, and flower sizes to beautifully fill a trellis along a fence, add height to an obelisk in the perennial bed, or grow up a mailbox pole.

REPURPOSED SUPPORTS

Repurposing items you find in your home or garage is an innovative and inexpensive approach to selecting vertical gardening structures. Instead of taking your three-tier fountain that no longer functions to the landfill, consider growing flowers, succulents or herbs in it to give it new life. Or what about spending \$9.95 on a hanging shoe organizer, filling it with potting soil and annuals or herbs to dress up an otherwise boring wall.

Vertical gardening is a fun, easy, and economical way to garden efficiently, save space, be more self-sustaining, and add beauty to an indoor or outdoor area. Choosing to grow up instead of out can help your plants and your creativity blossom. ✨

Iowa gardener Rita Perea is a garden speaker, a garden writer (RitaPereaGardenCommunicator.com) and the founder of the International Contemplative Garden Association (ContemplativeGardens.org), where she inspires sowing the seeds of mindfulness.

