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INHealth

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SUPPLEMENT TO THE INLANDER

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APRIL-MAY, 2013

ON THE COVER | ALEXY ILYASHENKO PHOTO



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Seeds of Good Health

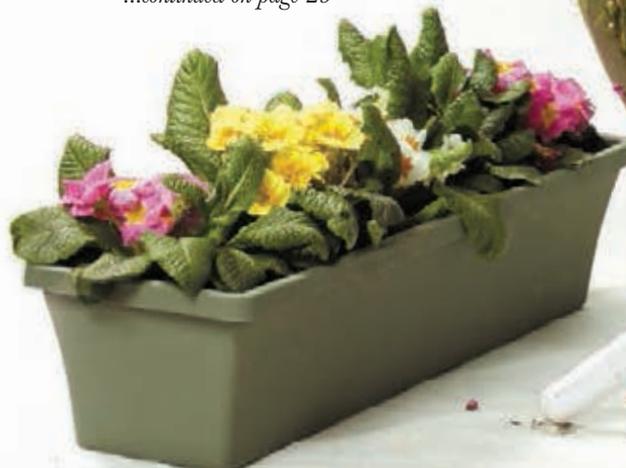
Studies show gardening at any age will keep your disposition sunny

BY E.J. IANNELLI

Ninety-eight-year-old Elizabeth Welty isn't your typical small-space gardener. For starters, she has the distinction of having been alive to see 17 of America's 44 presidents. She also has a tenacity that would put many of her much younger fellow hobbyists to shame.

Welty, a retired area physician and local arts advocate, exemplifies certain benefits of gardening that scientists have only recently begun to pinpoint experimentally. For instance, studies in the Netherlands and Norway have found that the mere act of cultivating plants offers essential respite from the frenetic pace of modern life and can alleviate symptoms of depression.

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CONTAINER GARDENS

Are you infamous for turning healthy houseplants into withered stalks? Do you have a knack for over-watering and under-fertilizing? As with any hobby, gardening requires some know-how, and it takes time to accumulate it. But don't let fear of the unknown or past misfortunes deter you. The great thing about small-space gardening is its minimal up-front investment. That allows more freedom to experiment.

Lea Scott spent years crisscrossing the country to practice organic farming; she came to Spokane as the AmeriCorps volunteer for Vinegar Flats. Although she now works as produce buyer for the Main Market Co-op in downtown Spokane, she still encourages prospective gardeners to cultivate their own plots.

"Herb gardens are a really good place to start," says Scott. "They flourish, you can cook with them, and they smell great. Basil does exceptionally well in pots, and if you frequently pinch it back at the nodes, it encourages the plant to bush out rather than to grow vertically. You'll be eating a lot more basil and making more pesto as a result."

She also advises erring on the large side when selecting a container. "As a general rule, whatever



size plant you're hoping for above ground, you need to give it that amount of space under the soil. Having good soil health is really beneficial too — you'll want to add compost." Although compost is best created out of household organic waste in

a dedicated outdoor bin, there are several online guides on how to vermicompost (that is, with worms) in a styrofoam cooler in the space under your sink. And if you haven't planned ahead, you can buy compost in bags or by the truckload.

"There are a lot of ways to be innovative," says Scott. When growing from seed, she personally uses reclaimed fluorescent strip lighting and homemade newspaper pots to get maximum results with little cost. "It all depends on what kind of space you've got. If you don't have access to space, there's an incredible number of community gardens in Spokane that are worth plugging into."

The most important piece of advice for beginners and experts alike is to not be afraid to fail. Whether you begin with seeds or buy starts, have courage — and confidence.

"Plants are geared to grow. They're going to do what they're meant to do," Scott says. "Gardening doesn't have to be a precise art. Getting out there and doing it is the first right step."

— E.J. IANNELLI

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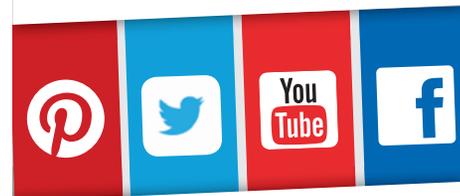


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"SEEDS OF GOOD HEALTH," CONTINUED...

Other studies have shown that long-term gardeners are up to 47 percent less likely to develop dementia in old age, or that 45 minutes of gardening can burn the same number of calories as half an hour of aerobics. A 2010 report in *Science Daily* noted that bacteria in the soil appear to decrease anxiety and boost intelligence in mice by increasing levels of serotonin in the body.

Welty's own evidence is less quantifiable and more anecdotal. "Certainly, gardening energizes a person. During the winter it keeps your mind going on what things to plant – how you're going to arrange them, what you're going to do differently this year. It keeps me busy because I have to take care of [the plants]. You have to get up and go, and that can be quite a challenge sometimes," she chuckles.



Master gardener Tonie Fitzgerald

She finds that tending to flowers like heliotrope, petunias and geraniums sustains her by giving her something "that's ongoing, that has a future to it. That's what's appealing about plants – the future. It's the magic of the development of the arrangements and the interplay of color. That's why I do it."

According to Tonie Fitzgerald, author of *Gardening in the Inland Northwest* and statewide Master Gardener Program Leader at Washington State University, the posited health benefits stem from a complex interplay of different factors.

"Seniors who garden report a higher quality of life, fewer health problems and more consumption of fruits and vegetables, which in turn leads to a healthier diet," she says. "It's the same thing with kids who garden. Early on, they develop a higher level of awareness of
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“SEEDS OF GOOD HEALTH,” CONTINUED...

nutrition, and they're more likely to garden through life than their counterparts.”

That in turn leads to healthier behavior, which begets more healthy behavior.

Both Fitzgerald and Welty began gardening long before a relatively recent surge in its popularity – a surge that

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VERTICAL GARDENING

When developers want to maximize land use without increasing their physical footprint, they start building upward. The same goes for gardeners.

The concept is called vertical gardening, and though it's recently become fashionable as city dwellers rekindle their connection to nature, it's as old as civilization itself. And all it requires is a wall.

"Vertical gardening is very popular among people who've downsized to a condo, a townhouse or an apartment," says Stacey Mann, facility manager at Lima Greenhouses/Vicki's Garden Center. "They find ways to put things up on the wall so they have space to garden."

As an example, she points to an upright shipping pallet. It looks ordinary enough, but Mann has made small modifications like adding a wooden back and "bottoms" to form long container rows. The rows can then be filled with potting soil and a variety of plants: herbs like thyme, oregano and parsley; edible flowers like nasturtium (its pickled seeds become capers) and pansies; and decorative plants like grasses and cyclamen. Its sturdiness and slim profile allow the pallet to be easily screw-mounted to a wall, or attached to a fence or balcony railing prior to planting.

Another one of Mann's ideas is to use a hanging shoe rack. "You can poke a hole in the bottom of every pouch, then you put your potting soil in the pouches. And each pouch can hold a different plant. As long as you water it, it'll grow."

As Mann shows, a vertical garden is limited only by your creativity. In her own home garden, she uses half-planters and old mailboxes to take advantage of free wall space on her garage or shed. She also notes that you don't really even need a wall. A whiskey barrel and a trellis make a perfect platform for climbing flowers like clematis or vining veggies such as beans.

Once you start thinking about it, you'll be



Stacey Mann with one of her green pallets. YOUNG KWAK PHOTO

surprised at the sheer number of vessels that can be transformed into little gardens. Mann recommends perusing photos online and scouring thrift and antique stores once you've been inspired. If

you'd rather leave the imagining to someone else, Mann says Vicki's Garden Center offers pre-finished pallets that come ready to hang.

— E.J. IANNELLI

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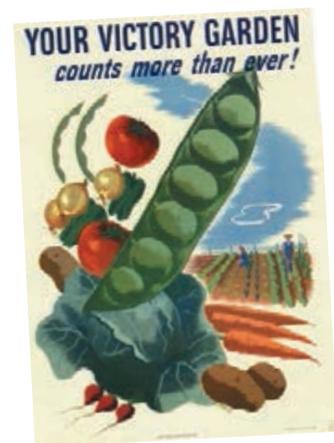
“SEEDS OF GOOD HEALTH” CONTINUED...

coincides with a growth in urban populations. That has resulted in something of a paradox. More people are gardening as a hobby (Fitzgerald’s annual WSU Master Gardener report highlights the program’s work with thousands of first-time gardeners in 2012 alone), but many of them have less space in which to do it.

Enter small-space gardening. Far from being cutting-edge, it revives a common practice that dwindled in the post-World War II era when Americans became more reliant upon the convenience of supermarkets. In 1944, for example, the small plots of urban land known as victory gardens were stewarded by around 19 million families across America. They are estimated to have accounted for 40 percent of the country’s total vegetable supply at the time.

“The average person under 40 years of age is two generations removed from any association with gardening or producing their own food,” says Fitzgerald. “That’s why it’s essential that we teach gardening, because these are not skills that have been passed along.”

Small-space gardening takes many forms: container gardening, vertical gardening, raised beds, and community gardens, to name only a few. What all of them have



In 1944, 19 million Americans had “victory gardens.”

in common is that each garden is only as large – or as tiny – as you want it to be.

Fortunately, the limited scale of small-space gardening isn’t accompanied by a limitation of its health benefits. In fact, reducing a garden to a manageable size for even the casual gardener reduces the pressure to generate big yields and allows more people to access its perks. The meditative calm of planting, the fun of trying new vegetables or enjoying a bright, colorful flower display, and the soul-deep satisfaction of the harvest are the same whether you have a 10-foot plot or a 10-inch pot. ■



Spokane's East Central Community Garden

YOUNG KWAK PHOTOS



COMMUNITY GARDENS

If your backyard or balcony isn't an ideal growing spot, or if you want to supplement the bounty of your home garden with greater variety, consider joining a community garden.

"The biggest benefit [of community gardening] for me is the sharing of the workload," says Paul Kimball, who runs the Emerson Community Garden in the Emerson-Garfield neighborhood alongside his wife Sara. "I really only have to garden a couple weeks a season. Another benefit is that networking with neighbors provides a wider base of knowledge. This last year we had one member who had expert knowledge on composting."

Community gardens come in as many flavors as the crops they produce. Some allow individuals or families to claim one or more plots, which are then tended and harvested separately. Others have a large shared space that is maintained and harvested collectively. Some charge a membership fee; some are free. Some require participants to invest a minimum amount

of time in upkeep; others share the yield with anyone who shows up. No matter your preference, there's probably a nearby community garden for you.

The relative advantages of community over private gardening are manifold. An obvious one is that they provide more opportunities to socialize — especially come late summer, when harvest time can blossom into a neighborhood-wide event. And community gardens have the advantage of being larger than many backyards. That means more room for space-hungry crops like corn and pumpkins.

"The biggest joy comes from meeting neighbors and building friendships," says Kimball. "Our motto for the Emerson Community Garden is 'Neighborhood Roots, Garden Fruits.'"

There are about two dozen easy-to-find community gardens in the Inland Northwest. To locate one, visit www.greenspokane.org or get in touch with your neighborhood council.

— E.J. IANNELLI

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