With the right resources, any home gardener can turn the smallest scrap of patio into a vibrant oasis. Over the years, Penn State Extension has put together a number of articles, fact sheets, and videos to help you make your outdoor space the envy of the neighborhood. Check out these quick tips for different types of small space gardens, and visit the guide on the back of this page for QR codes to additional resources.

**Gardening in Containers**
Containers are perfect for patios, stoops, and balconies. When choosing plants for a container, the most important things to consider are the light and temperature conditions of your space. A south-facing porch with no cover will need very different plants than an east-facing, covered balcony.

Whether you want to grow flowers, herbs, or vegetables in your container (see Figure 1 for an example of a combination), it will need a lot of water and fertilizer. Plan to water your container daily and fertilize every two to four weeks.

**Figure 1.** A part-shade spring container garden with sugar-snap peas, lettuce, and violas. Credit: Erin Kinley

**Strategies for Small Yards**
Small yards, especially in urban settings or new housing developments, have a number of challenges. Not only are they typically hot and dry, but they often have high salt content from winter sidewalk and road salt. They also tend to be compacted from construction or years of foot traffic. Rebuilding the soil through methods such as sheet composting can be a helpful first step to making your yard a more hospitable environment for plants.

Even with healthier soil, you will still want to choose hardy plants that are well adapted to the sun and temperature conditions of your yard. Plants recommended for “hellstrips” (strips between a sidewalk and a street or driveway; Figure 2) also do well in small-yard conditions.

**Figure 2.** A hellstrip with shade-loving plants, including hostas. Credit: Holly Thorp
A word of caution: Small yards often cover space over utility and water lines. Before doing any new, major planting, it is wise to contact your state’s “Call Before You Dig” Hotline. In Pennsylvania, you can dial 8-1-1 or scan the code below for the Pennsylvania 811 website.

**Gardening in Raised Beds**

Raised beds are an excellent choice if you have a small yard with contaminated soil or drainage issues that make in-ground gardening a challenge. They can also make gardening more accessible if you have trouble kneeling or bending over in regular garden beds.

There are several methods for constructing raised beds. With lumber, a power drill, and screws, you can build your own (scan the code below for a video demonstration), or you can assemble a bed using “castle blocks” purchased from your local home improvement store (Figure 3). For long-lasting lumber, choose untreated hardwoods such as locust, cedar, Osage orange, redwood, or oak. Last, fill your raised bed with a blend of 70 percent soil and 30 percent compost. If your soil is contaminated and you want to plant herbs or vegetables in your raised bed, make sure to line the bottom with a heavy landscape fabric before filling with soil.

Raised beds are similar to container gardens in that they will need a steady supply of water and fertilizer to keep plants healthy. Plan to water daily and fertilize about once a month.

**Figure 3**

Corner of a raised bed constructed with castle blocks.

Credit: Erin Kinley

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