



By *Barbara Elmore, HCMG*

Planning Your Portable Garden

More people are planning to garden this year than in 2008 – seven million more households, to be exact. That's what the National Gardening Association found out in a new survey, "The Impact of Home and Community Gardening in America."

The reasons for the increased interest vary from economic pressures to wanting better-tasting, safer food. The survey also shows that almost half – 48 percent – of gardeners are using containers.

So which vegetables like containers? Almost all, veteran gardeners say. If the crop will do well in a normal garden plot, it should do fine in a container, given some parameters.

Better crops for containers include:

- Peas and beans
- Onions, carrots and potatoes
- Lettuce
- Cucumbers and summer squash
- Tomatoes
- Radishes, peppers, parsley and other herbs.

Feel free to be creative when choosing a container. You can use anything from traditional pots to the more eclectic – cartons, plastic garbage containers, baskets, buckets, boxes, urns, wheelbarrows and bowls. Just remember to use a container that's free of chemicals and deep enough to allow the roots of your vegetables to develop. For most of the popular plants you want to grow, you will need between 8 and 12 inches of depth

Other guidelines:

Be sure your container has drainage holes – some like side drainage the best – and cover the bottom with pea gravel to allow for even better drainage. Instead of garden soil, which presents drainage problems and might lead to disease, use a container mix from your garden store or make your own with vermiculite, peat moss, sawdust, compost and minerals. After seedlings come up, fertilize once a month. If you have bad luck with seeds, you can use seedlings at the outset.

So what plantings might be the most productive? Mother Earth News is conducting its own survey of gardeners to discover their opinions about certain edibles. The nationwide survey is ongoing and the results are too numerous to detail, but here's a sample of what 1,359 gardeners say are "the most easy and productive" plants to grow. The percentages in parentheses after the crop indicate how many people gave that answer:

- Peas and beans
- Snap beans and bush beans (38.3 percent)
- Leafy greens
- Lettuce (38.6 percent)
- Root crops
- Onions (34.8 percent)
- Carrots (31.6 percent)
- Potatoes (30.1 percent)
- Cucumber family
- Cucumbers (40.4 percent)
- Summer squash (38.3 percent)
- Tomato family
- Slicing tomato (50.1 percent)
- Cherry tomato (44.9 percent)

These last two crops also received top votes for "great use of space and time."

One of the biggest mistakes that new gardeners make, according to the experts, is creating too big of a garden space. Starting with containers is a good way to get around the over-eagerness issue. And containers make it easy to find just the right location for your garden – and to take it with you if you move.