

Garden delights

Enjoy these tips for growing a mid-summer edible oasis in any space.

It may be June, but it's not too late to get started with your own homegrown edible oasis.

It's easier than you might think, and very rewarding. You'll save money on grocery bills, know exactly what you're eating and have fun doing it too. And growing fresh, organic, home grown produce is not the only health benefit; gardening is also great for [stress relief](#).

Of course, eating local veggies is also good for the environment. You'll save on car trips to and from the grocery store, support a healthy local ecosystem and, if you go organic, you'll [avoid adding chemicals](#) that can accumulate in the food chain and [upset the ecological balance](#).

Some veggies are better to start in the early [spring](#), but there's still plenty of time for others, especially herbs, edible flowers and some perennials. And no matter whether you have a big backyard or small patio, you have lots of options. Homegrown edibles grow great in [containers placed](#) on a doorstep, deck, or balcony.

[Herbs](#) add colour and fragrance to the garden and can transform a simple dish into a culinary masterpiece. Most are very simple to grow, often occupying small spaces. As a bonus, most herbs support vegetables by attracting bees and other [pollinators](#) to your garden.

Start with small annuals, like basil and dill — but don't forget to do some research or ask around to find out what grows well in your area. Basil tends to work best in a container and it's usually pretty easy to find at local farmer's markets. Dill is another good option — especially if you're growing cucumbers and want to try your hand at some [homemade pickles](#)! It does well in most climates and one plant can produce for two years (biennial).

Perennial herbs like oregano will come back year after year to help you spice up pasta dishes and salad dressings. Oregano grows well in a small planter, or as filler in empty garden spaces. Thyme and rosemary are attractive low-maintenance options that work well on the border of a flowerbed or vegetable patch. Mint is another good choice, especially to [ward off](#) those pesky summertime bugs! But be careful: mint can be invasive so it's best to confine it to part of your garden with metal or plastic edging, or grow it in its own

container.

[Edible flowers](#) are a good three-for-one mid-summer option: they're tasty, they add colour to the garden and they attract beneficial insects. Chives and nasturtium are among the easiest and most versatile herbs that produce edible flowers. Chive stems go nicely with baked potatoes and the flowers make a lovely addition to salads. Both the leaves and flowers of nasturtium plants are [edible](#), giving a peppery flavour to salads and an elegant garnish to desserts.

There's still time to grow a few veggies too, depending on your [climate zone](#). Some greens, such as baby leaf lettuce and mesclun blends, grow quickly; carrots can be planted in two- to three-week cycles; even some varieties of tomatoes have enough time to fruit. If your space is small, try a [hanging tomato basket](#).

Now is also the time for wise gardeners to start thinking ahead. Consider starting permanent plants, such as raspberries, rhubarb and asparagus; they're the best value for your dollar and effort, producing every year for [at least a decade](#) (though it typically takes a few years before they're mature enough to harvest). For more information on the best "[repeat performers](#)," check out this top-ten list of ideas from gardening and culinary expert [Mark Cullen](#). And, while you're at it, be sure to read Mark's top-ten tips for keeping your yard earth-friendly.

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