

Order your salad to go with a portable gourmet container garden

Galvanized washtub can yield plenty of greens in tiny space

By Renee Studebaker
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

A co-worker informed me a few days ago that my idea of a quick and easy bed for growing vegetables didn't sound quick or easy to her. She might be right. I'm a pretty hard-core do-it-yourselfer when it comes to garden projects, so to me, a no-dig layered bed seems fairly simple and not too backwrenching compared with a lot of other tough "oh my gawd, I can't believe I'm doing this" garden projects I've tackled over the years.

So, if quick and easy is what you're after, try this recipe for a salad garden. It won't give you a blister or a backache, and you can start and finish it in one afternoon. I promise.



Renee Studebaker AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Plant your portable garden with Swiss chard, lettuce, spinach, radicchio, pac choy, fennel, radishes and green onions. You'll be able to harvest from the plants to make salads again and again.

Gourmet Salad Container Garden

- 1 galvanized metal tub, 10½ gallons
- 1 bag good quality organic garden soil
- Small rocks and/or broken pottery pieces (enough to fill a standard size bucket halfway)
- 2 or 3 handfuls of dead leaves
- 1 Swiss chard transplant
- 3 spinach transplants
- 1 radicchio transplant
- 2 buttercrunch lettuce transplants
- 1 fennel transplant (a variety that produces a bulb)
- 6-8 onion transplants
- 1 red leaf lettuce transplant
- 1 red pac choy transplant
- 12 seeds from a packet of French breakfast radishes
- Mulch (about a bucket full of pine needles, crushed dead leaves or shredded cedar)
- Liquid seaweed
- Fish emulsion

Poke a bunch of holes in the bottom of the tub. A nail and hammer will do the job,

or, even better, a punch and a hammer. Spread rocks evenly on bottom of tub. Cover with leaves. Pour in bag of soil (leave a couple of inches at top for a layer of mulch).

Remove the fennel plant from its plastic pot and, using your hands or a trowel, make a hole (about the same width and depth as the pot it came out of) in the soil about 2 or 3 inches from the inside edge of the tub. Set the plant gently in the hole. Do the same thing with each plant, leaving a few inches of space between each plant. Save some space in the front for your radish seeds. Drop seeds on top of the soil and cover lightly with about ¼ inch of additional soil. (The French breakfast radishes, a fast-maturing, heat-tolerant variety, will be ready to pull and eat in about 25 days.) Using a pencil or stick, poke holes about 1 to 1½ inches deep to plant onions. (Leave the green tops of the onions sticking out above the soil.)

Carefully place small amounts of mulch between



Rocks and holes in the bottom of a galvanized washtub will improve drainage and keep your plants from getting waterlogged.

plants. Leave a 1-inch ring of unmulched space around each plant. Water gently with diluted liquid seaweed (1 table-

spoon to a gallon of water). Set your tub in a spot that gets at least six hours of direct sun. After a week or so, when the plants are settled into their new home and starting to put on new growth, fertilize with a teaspoon of fish emulsion mixed into the water in your watering can.

To harvest, use scissors to trim leaves off each plant as you need them. Spinach and lettuce will continue to produce new leaves until the weather warms up; then they will start to bolt and produce seed instead of leaves. That's when it's time to harvest the last leaves, pull up the plants and toss them into your compost pile.

When you harvest leaves from your container plants, be careful not to cut the stems too close to the base of the plants — leave a little bit of stem sticking up.

As chard matures, it develops a bulbous base that resists drought and heat, so it will continue to produce new leaves through spring and sometimes

CALENDAR ■ EVENTS

Flower Arranging with Tulips. 10:30 a.m. to noon Thursdays through March 5. Kinney Avenue Christian Fellowship, 1801 Kinney Ave. Course fee \$20 plus \$10 each week for fresh flowers. Lifetime Learning Institute, 206-4232.

Beginning Birding. 2 to 4 p.m. Mondays through March 16. Includes trip to a local birding hot spot. Christ Lutheran Church, 300 E. Monroe St. \$20. Call Lifetime Learning Institute, 206-4232.

Winter 2009 Series. 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesdays until April 8. Permaculture talks and videos about sustainability. Habitat Suites, 500 E. Highland Mall Drive. Free. 619-5363. www.permie.us.

Permaculture Design Course. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. select weekend days until March 28. Check www.permie.us for schedule. March 7 and March 21-22 design workshops are for full-course students and graduates from design class only. TreeFolks, 10803 Platt Lane. \$500 whole course; \$60 each day. 619-5363.

Heart O' Texas Orchid Society's 38th Annual Orchid Show and Sale. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. today and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday. Show and display. Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Road. Free. 477-8672, www.hotos.org.

'From the Ground Up.' Through 4 p.m. Sunday. The Texas Conference on Organic Production Systems for gardeners and farmers. Sponsored by the Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association. Killen Civic and Conference Center, 3601 S. W.S. Young Drive, Killen. 254-501-3888. \$125-400. www.tofga.org.

Austin Organic Gardeners Club Meeting. 7 to 9 p.m. Monday. A panel will discuss gardening issues. Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Road. Free. 443-7187, www.austinorganic-gardeners.org.

Exploring Amazing and Diverse Bromeliads. 7:30 p.m. Tuesday. Zilker Botanical Garden, Green room of the Zilker Garden Center, 2220 Barton Springs Road. Free. www.main.org/abs

Austin Bonsai Society. 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Wednesday. Re-potting techniques. Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Road. Free. 266-2655.

Lady Bird Johnson Adopt-A-Garden Program of The Trail Foundation. 11 a.m. to noon Feb. 14. Learn about adopting gardens along Lady Bird Lake. Zilker Botanical Garden Center, 2220 Barton Springs Road. Free. 467-9489.

— Compiled by Ameera Butt



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WARNING: Participation in the Austin American-Statesman Capitol 10,000 (Statesman Cap 10K) can be a serious threat to the health of individuals who are not in excellent physical condition and health. The race committee reserves the right to refuse any entry. No motorized wheelchairs allowed. Wheelchair athletes must use only their own physical power to move their wheelchairs. All wheelchair participants must use a racing wheelchair, a CPSC-certified helmet and quality to participate in the 2009 CAP10K (see requirements above). No pets allowed. No wheels allowed, including roller blades, skateboards, bicycles, etc. Registered entrants pushing baby strollers will be seeded in the Walk category (the last starting group). STROLLERS WILL NOT BE ALLOWED IN THE TIMED/COMPETITIVE CATEGORY. Entry invalid if waiver not accepted. NO REFUNDS.

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