

# Small Space Gardening

Balconies and Indoor Plants

renaissance**living**  
*Surrey Hills*



# Small Space Gardening

## Your Presenter

Robert Meloury (B.Hort, MaLa).

- Landscape Architect and Horticulturist based in Melbourne designing throughout Victoria and Tasmania.
- Professionally qualified Horticulturist – Degree in Horticulture from Burnley Horticultural College (Melbourne University)
- Professionally qualified Landscape Architect – Post Grad Diploma and Masters Degree in Landscape Architecture (Melbourne University)
- Private Practise specialising in residential landscape design approaching 30<sup>th</sup> Year in landscape construction and design.
- Hobbies, Gardening (Orchids), Fishing, Model Train Enthusiast & Aviculturist.

## Small Space Gardening

- Gardening like any hobby can be as grand or as simple as your imagination and your budget takes you.

Small Space Gardening offers several interesting and challenging fields of specialisation amongst which are ;

# Small Space Gardening Green Walls



# Small Space Gardening Balcony Pots



# Small Space Gardening Indoor Pots



## Small Space Gardening Window Box Plantings



## Small Space Gardening Productive Pot Plantings



## Small Space Gardening

A couple of the most important factors to consider are;

- **General local climate** - especially important for Balcony gardens
- **Micro Climate** – also important for Balcony gardens but critical for indoor plants.

These factors include ;

- **Light** – Direct, indirect, amount of light
- **Water** – irrigated, self watering, direct watering in person
- **Fertilizing** – Long term, short term, pelletised vs liquid
- **Plants Specific requirements** – humidity, light, water, nutrients, pruning, pest control.
- **Human Factors** - your care or ability level – essentially your plants are dependent on you to supply their critical needs.

# Small Space Gardening

Working through the critical factors.

Light.

Plants require light to synthesise (energy production) – depending on their natural habitat plants may be able to adapt to a new environment. Generally, without enough light stems will grow long and lanky, with foliage eventually turning pale and dying.

A simple means of checking if lighting is suitable for most plants requiring bright indoor light is to hold a white piece of paper upright towards the window in the position where you propose to place the plant. Place your hand about 20 cm away from and in between the window and the paper. If you can see a shadow there should be adequate light – if not you may still place a plant there but on the understanding it will not be a position suitable for the long term and will require rotation to an outdoor protected position, generally one week inside to two weeks outside.

A well lit position is considered to be within 1 meter of north facing window, medium within 2 metres, low light between 2 – 3 metres, >3 m generally not viable.

Regardless, it will benefit the plant if it is physically rotated in place every couple of days to benefit light reaching all foliage which will minimise a lean towards the window.

A general guide on a plants suitability for a dimly lit position is how dark green the foliage is. The darker the foliage the more chlorophyll it contains and the greater the suitability to thrive in poor light. Plants with light green, yellow or white variegated foliage need much more light and are better suited to brighter areas of the home.

# Small Space Gardening

## Water.

Don't water to a timetable. Plants don't use water this way and will generally be either over or under watered which is the most common reason for indoor plant failure. Water only when required – this will vary depending on plant type, location, season (warmth or cold), pot size and material as well as the potting media used. The best way to water is to feel the top 5 cm of media, watering only when the soil feels more dry than moist. Depending on the factors above watering may vary from roughly weekly to monthly.

The best means of watering is to take the plant outside and gently mist spray the plant – this cleans your plant removing dust and refreshes the plant, followed by a good soak in a bucket or sink until bubbles stop rising. Remove and drain for an hour before replacing to its position. Always place a saucer under pots to prevent damage to finishes and surfaces. Unless specifically noted as a cultural requirement for your plants do not leave water in the saucer as this will result in sodden potting mix, generally leading to root rot.

In winter it is best to use tepid water to irrigate as cold water may cause shock to indoor plants which are used to warmer temperatures found inside, watering with cold water frequently causes leaf shed.

Don't water of an evening unless there are obvious signs of water stress (deprivation). Plants do not uptake water during the night – only actively using water during photosynthesis. Watering of an evening is prone to create issues such as moulds and mildews and encourage collar rot.

# Small Space Gardening

Fertilizing.

Because of lack of light most indoor plants do not grow quickly so don't need regular fertiliser application. In fact in winter when most plants go into a virtual hibernation any fertiliser applied will be wasted money.

The easiest and most efficient means of fertilising is to apply a slow release pelletised fertiliser at the start of spring. These fertilisers are water and temperature sensitive, releasing the appropriate amount of nutrients continuously for up to 9 months.

The amount to be applied depends on the size of the pot and it is critical that you apply the correct amount following the manufacturers specifications exactly.

Fertilisers are a salt based product, and if applied excessively will actually prevent the plant from water uptake due to an osmotic imbalance in the soil. In effect regardless of the amount of water applied the plant can die of dehydration as the plants root systems will be unable to process the available water.

Another alternative to slow release agents are liquid fertilisers. These are commonly used on vegetable and fruit crops with high nutrient demands. Again follow manufactures recommendations strictly, using only on every 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> water so as minimise the likelihood of over fertilising.

Liquid fertilisers should only be applied to moist soils to minimise root burn.

## Small Space Gardening

### Humidity.

In winter when houses are heated and windows are closed the humidity levels commonly drop to lower than that found in a desert, not favourable conditions for most plants. Given most indoor plants are shade lovers to some degree, they also share a trait of preferring a relatively humid environment. Low humidity is a common cause of these plants showing brown, dry edges and can cause leaf drop and loss of lustre.

To counteract this issue it is best to keep plants in airy, well ventilated rooms, and if several plants are present to cluster together to increase the local humidity. Another means of improving humidity is to sit pots in saucers of water on pebbles, which increases humidity as the water evaporates. Misting of the leaves regularly (twice a day) is also highly recommended.

If plants can be kept out of heated rooms they will benefit.

# Small Space Gardening

## Temperature

As much as I've advised to try to keep plants out of heated rooms, most indoor plants are also from tropical regions and to remain looking good will require a minimum temperature as well as the preceding factors.

When temperatures fall below 15 degrees celcius tropical plants will begin to suffer. Plants prefer to have a consistent temperature cycle rather than artificially heated then chilled when the heating is turned off.

Simple solutions such as closing of blinds can help insulate plants from chill frequently thrown by large glass windows. Plants should not be isolated between the blinds and glass as this area will become very cold.

# Small Space Gardening

## Common Problems & Solutions

Plant Droop

Insufficient Water or too cold / drafty position  
Check media for wettness  
Move to warmer airy but not drafty position.

Brown Leaf Tips

Lower Leaves Yellow

Leaf Loss

Too much water  
Allow potting mix to dry out between waterings  
Repot using better draining media

Growth Spindly

Yellow Streaked Leaves

White Crust on potting mix surface

Over Fertilising  
Repot into new media  
Reduce fertiliser application rates

Brown patches / Blotchy Leaves

Too much direct sunlight  
Move out of direct light

Spindly Growth

Long distance between leaves

New growth pale / small

Insufficient Light  
Prune back spindly growth and place in brighter spot

Leaf Edges turn brown / Curl under

Insufficient Humidity – too much heat  
Move to cooler location, mist foliage daily

Leaves pale all over, smaller than usual, Chlorosis

Insufficient Fertiliser  
Apply slow release fertiliser / liquid fertiliser

# Small Space Gardening

Concentrating on Indoor plants for a moment.

Indoor plants are at the moment going through a huge revival for a myriad of reasons.

- Aesthetically pleasing – Decorative Qualities
  - Colour – Foliage, Flowers
  - Affordable means to decorate – suit a range of styles and decors.
- Environmental factors
  - Air Filters
  - Life and Vitality
- Sentimental reasons – Evoke memories
  - Family & travel memories
  - Generational plants
- Make a wonderful thoughtful gift
  - Personal
  - long term

# Small Space Gardening

## Popular Indoor Plants

Adiantum aethiopicum  
Aglaonema spp.  
Aloe barbadensis  
Anthurium andraenum  
Calathea orbifolia  
Chlorophyllum comosum  
Codiaenum spp.  
Crassula ovata  
Dracaena sanderiana  
Dracaena fragrans  
Ficus lyrata  
Howea forsteriana  
Phaenopsis cvs.  
Philodendron scandens  
Philodendron 'Xanadu'  
Pilea peperomioides  
Musa  
Saintpaulia  
Sanseveria trifasciata  
Schefflera aboricola  
Spathyphyllum wallsii  
Zamioculcas zamiifolia

Maiden Hair Fern  
Chinese Evergreen  
Aloe Vera  
Flamingo Flower  
Prayer Plant  
Spider Plant  
Croton  
Jade Plant  
Lucky Bamboo  
Corn Plant  
Fiddle Leaf Fig  
Kentia Palm  
Moth Orchid  
Sweetheart Plant  
Philodendron  
Chinese Money Plant  
Banana Tree  
African Violet  
Snake Plant / Mother in Laws Tongue  
Umbrella Plant  
Peace Lily / Madonna Lily  
ZZ Plant



# Small Space Gardening

## Popular Vegetables , Fruit and Herbs

Beans  
Bok Choi  
Broccoli  
Capsicum  
Chilli  
Kale  
Lettuce  
Spinach  
Tomatoes  
Zucchini



Blueberries  
Citrus – Lemon / Lime / Mandarin  
Strawberries



Basil  
Chives  
Coriander  
Mint  
Oregano  
Parsley  
Rosemary  
Thyme



# Small Space Gardening

Designing with plants in Small Spaces.

A couple of characteristics worth considering when incorporating plants into small spaces include;

Plant Form - what shape, size, density will the plant exhibit ? Upright, weeping, bushy, climbing.

Leaf Size - aesthetically pleasing combinations may be achieved by juxtaposing small foliated plants with broad expansive foliage.

Leaf Shape – a very strong characteristic which may produce striking displays by concentrating on contrasting or harmonising foliage shapes.

Leaf Colour – from simple shades of green, variegations or strong bold colours, silvers or whites, purples and reds. Dramatic displays can be achieved by the interplay between strong, but generally limited colour palettes.

Leaf Texture – varying from glossy to matte, hairy to wrinkled, ribbed to crenelated.

Flower Colour – the plants means of reproduction, we use them as highlights to accentuate colour schemes, either working with or in contrast to surrounding colours in the landscape.

Flower Shape – arranged simply, in whorls, in globes, sprays or panicles the variety of flower shape can be used to highlight shapes and space.

# Small Space Gardening

## Planting Containers.

Just as important as the plant they are to provide a home for are the pots or containers that house them.

Criteria to bear in mind when selecting pots include;

Proportion – matching the plant size to the pot is generally a wise decision to provide visual balance.

Style – choose a pot style that will enhance the ambiance of the room for which they are intended.

Colour – take care not to outshine the plant. A less is more approach with colours of the same hue when clustering pots is generally a safe practice to provide visual unity.

Functionality – Self watering pots are a wonderful time saving device (and often plant saving) – take care not to over water as they often do not have over flow ability.

Finish – plastic vs terracotta / stone / concrete. Matte vs glazed. Often a personal preference it is best to choose one finish and stick to it to minimise clashes.

As for most design streams, there are basic 'rules' to follow, which of course are made to be broken. In general I always advise clients as long as you like it, that is all that ultimately matters.

## Small Space Gardening

In Summary.

- Enjoy this hobby – try new plants, experiment with different combinations, include productive with aesthetic plants.
- Larger pots are easier to maintain though more difficult to move.
- Consider your microclimate and match this to your plant selection before purchasing your plants to avoid a high likelihood of disappointment.
- Read the back of plant labels – they are there to make your life easier.
- Most importantly, don't over water or over fertilise.
- Buy plants you like – you will be living with them.

## Small Space Gardening

Thank you for attending this afternoon.

We now invite you to share with us a wonderful afternoon tea by Cynthia from Gourmet Touch with chance for an informal chat on any gardening questions.

