

# **Miniature Orchard**

**A guide to growing miniature  
fruit trees in containers (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)**

By

**Thean Pheh**

Trees N More  
Horticulture Books

All pictures and illustrations were the work of the author.

Miniature Orchard – A guide to growing miniature fruit trees in containers  
(2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

COPYRIGHT © 2013 Thean Pheh

Published by

Trees N More  
Theanpheh64@MSN.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means – mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without the written permission of the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-9865044-7-1

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in publication

Printed in Alberta

# Content

## **Part One – Basic Knowledge**

Prologue – How I started	4
Introduction	7
History and use of growing plants in containers	13
Plant physiology and morphology	19
Location and shelter	24
Container	28
Potting soil/media	31
Watering	35
Fertilizing	39
Training and pruning	42
Tools	62
Overwintering	65
Getting Started	69
This and That	73

## **Part Two - Directory**

Apples to Wolfberry	79
Training Tidbits	216
Appendix	230
Epilogue	236
Glossary	238
Nomenclature	242
Index	245

## Prologue - How I started

Every culture has its own myths and oldwife's tales. There is no smoke without fire. These might have started ignorantly or with very valid reasons and people adhered to them rigidly for fear that breaking even a tiny part would bring miseries. But, as time goes by more knowledge become available and values change, these practices become illogical and irrelevant and we label them as oldwife's tales. Growing up on a small isolated farm with no neighbours to play with, I spent my days tinkering with this and that. Like every farm kid I experimented with growing different plants in different ways. I knew growing perennial fruit trees in containers could be done but somehow or other growing them in containers seemed alien and not right. I remember trying to grow a small *rambutan* tree in an old holey pail and my father saying "Indian boy, don't waste your time." (My father was fond of calling me Indian boy because I had the darkest complexion in the family.) To him and other growers, growing fruit trees in containers were just temporary measures, sort of transitory before they were planted out into the fields. So I grew up with the mentality that growing fruit trees in containers was futile.

As with many things, getting into growing fruit trees in containers permanently started accidentally and innocently. When I started breeding for a hobby, I found bending over to emasculate, bag, collect pollens and pollinate small flowers was a royal pain in that part of my anatomy where the sun never shine. The problem was more painful, and bloody too at times, especially when gooseberries were the candidates. Being a lazy fellow I was looking for a better and easier way - a short cut would be better still. I started planting them in containers so that I could bring the plants indoor and raise them to eye level so that I could sit up straight to get the job done. Without pollinating insects to mess up my work, I also eliminated the bagging. (I also realized that I was not bothered and distracted by those pesky mosquitoes either.) It worked like a charm but still I did not think much about the whole thing as breeding work meant few fruits were allowed to develop - I was only interested in the seeds rather than the quality and quantity of the fruits or the aesthetic of the plants. With alkaline clayey soil, trying to lower the pH to grow blueberry was a monumental job and I decided to take the easy way out by growing them in containers.

One evening while sitting in the garden trying to unwind after a hard and very bad day at work, my eyes drifted to the pots with berries in

a range of colors at different stages of ripening. I had those plants for a few years but I never saw them as anything more than breeding materials or oddities that require daily watering in summer. If it had not been a bad day at work, perhaps like every other day they were just that. But, on that day, not realizing that was my release valve, I walked over and began dabbling at them. As I fiddled away – looking at them more intimately, questioning and answering myself while peeling away thorns from the gooseberry bushes - I noticed the frustration, anger and disappointment that I had brought home with me dissipated. It started slowly but soon I was transported into a different world. I felt relaxed and despite the shouting and yelling of parents whose children were playing soccer in the field across the road, and noises from the heavy traffic just a few yards away, I found peace and tranquility. It hit home and I began to wonder if I had missed out what Penjing and Bonsai artists had discovered ages ago. It dawned on me that if I could combine the ornamental aspects with good fruit production I could have my cake and eat it too. From a daily boring routine to an accidental solace it became a gratifying ritual that I actually looked forward to each day. Like everything else, one thing led to another and before long, other fruits were added. Little did I realize that it's contagious and a little addictive, especially when it was fueled by praises from friends and strangers.

They say an idle mind is a devil's workshop. Devil's workshop or not, I like tinkering with this and that when I have time in my hands. My wife says I'm a compulsive collector. From gooseberries, blueberries and lingonberries, not only did the list started to expand but also the training of the plants. I knew about Penjing and Bonsai but had until then considered it too time consuming, artificial and perhaps a little cruel. Like most people, I was so bias and blind that I did not even want to read an article on the subject. I did not even care that I was not entitled to any opinion on something I knew nothing about. As I dealt deeper into training and pruning those gooseberry bushes, it became harder and harder not to take a peep at those books especially after many bloody and painful experiences working with those fully armored bushes. Each time I walked pass the shelves in the Edmonton Public Library those books seem to grab my attention. One day I ate humble pie and borrowed one. It led to several and at last my eyes were opened when I realized the amount of knowledge the participants must have and the devotion of time, energy and other resources they provided for their charges. I cannot say I am sold and am a Penjing or Bonsai artist. My work will get failing grades since I pay scant attention to their established rules, principles of triangulation or container

types. Since I concentrate on fruit bearing plants only and my primary goal is quality fruits for eating, I can only call my practice Miniature Orchard and enjoy the trees and shrubs in my own way.

Growing fruit trees in containers is not a new revolutionary idea that I developed. Our ancestors probably started growing fruit trees in containers soon after they abandoned the food gathering lifestyle. Historical records show Ramese III grew fruit trees in containers nearly four thousand years ago. Soon after *Anno Domini* Chinese nobles miniaturized regular trees to decorate palaces and mansions. Miniature Orchard is a marriage of these two ancient arts. I am sure others have practiced it silently around the world. Now that I know Miniature Orchard is very rewarding and therapeutic, I'm merely trying to expose the practice, and be a catalyst to speed up its acceptance. As more and more people are living in high-density urban areas with its associated stresses, many will find Miniature Orchard is a practical solution to many limitations.

This book is written for gardeners living on the harsh Prairie Provinces of Canada and those in the United States with similar climate. As only cold hardy fruits plants will be noted in this treatise the numbers of plant types are very limited. Those living with better growing conditions or who have the financial means to run greenhouses, atriums or controlled environment can add many more to their repositories. Those who wish to include tropical and less hardy temperate fruits, beverages, vegetables and herbs can really expand their horizons.

There are two parts to this book. Each chapter in Part One is a separate entity. You may jump from one to the other – reading up only on the topics that you are interested in. Having said that, I recommend you read “Before you Start” in “Introduction” before thinking seriously of getting into this form of gardening.

Part two is a directory that provides Miniature Orchard gardeners with information and assistance to 28 types of hardy fruit trees/shrubs that can be grown on the prairie. The trees are listed alphabetically.

Common names are not that common. To avoid confusion, botanists use botanical or Latin names. Nomenclature is included for those who wish to positively identify their trees. I try to use as few technical words as possible. A glossary is provided for technical words used.

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

Men must have been growing plants in containers soon after settling down more permanently. While gardeners in Canada have no problem growing ornamental trees indoor, almost all plant growing in containers in the outdoor are confined to annuals. Many Canadians believe only annuals are suitable as our climate is too harsh for growing trees in containers. Hence, of the many trees that are purchased each year almost all are destined for planting in the ground. The assumptions that trees are big and need lots of air and root spaces, and endless care may be reasonable. Strong winds toppling down pots and trees only lend more reason for staying away from growing trees in containers. There are some truths to these presumptions but there are ways to overcome or prevent all these shortcomings.

Perhaps Penjing and Bonsai are the most well-known and established art of growing trees in containers. Practitioners follow very rigid rules. Training principles and methods, styles and even the containers are stipulated and adhered to without question. Trees are grouped as informal, formal uprights, leaning, windswept, broom, cascading and weeping. Each is further classified according to their sizes, ranging from miniatures (6 inches) to giants (36 inches). Unlike these two established art forms, small Miniature Orchard trees can be from a few inches to one and half feet, those to three feet are intermediate and anything to five feet is big. Although Miniatures Orchard borrows heavily from these two arts, there are no fixed rules to follow – gardeners are free to train their plants into whatever shape, form and style, and plant them into containers of whatever shapes and sizes they can get their hands on. The other major philosophical difference is while Penjing and Bonsai aim at pacifying emotions and mental health, Miniature Orchard feeds the body too. The first priority is quality fruit production. While shape, size and appearance are important they are only secondary. Also, in traditional Penjing and Bonsai, gardeners tend to restrict themselves to a few classical ornamental tree species while Miniature Orchard gardeners deal with edible fruit bearing plants only.

We may deny it but whether we like it or not unless our livelihood depends on it, gardening is a form of escapism. The highly competitive rat race society we are living in and the shortages of green spaces will accelerate the draw towards the spiritual aspects of gardening. The margin between Penjing, Bonsai and Miniature Orchard is rather fluid and it

depends on the individual to flow into one form or the other. Miniature Orchard gardeners may eventually marry these arts. That's perfectly fine as long as they are happy and the trees are healthy and productive. So long as the gardeners are enjoying the labor, beauty of their creations and fruits to nourish the body and soul, everything else pertaining to gardening is minor. It must also be remembered that owing to their fruiting habits, for some plants it is not possible to maintain their shapes and sizes rigidly for long period and still remain healthy and productive. Hence although the margin is fluid, for these species it is a delicate balancing act of trying to marry these arts.

### **Best Friend**

The garden is my best friend whom I can visit any time without notice or prior appointment. I can visit when I'm happy or in deep sorrow or the foulest mood. I do not have to think twice before opening my mouth for fear of saying the wrong words and suffer the consequences. Plants in the garden are immobile yet they can dance gracefully with the wind. They must be deaf for they never answer back or respond to my vocal and emotional expressions – appreciations or admonishments. Although those miniature trees cannot speak, yet there is communication. In their silence they tell and teach me wisdom and humility. They don't force those on me for I must seek them earnestly before they release their secrets. I feel at ease and at peace with the world for they transport me to another dimension where I lose all problems, stresses and worries temporarily, and time flies by. They erase my sorrows and replace them with joy. Although my problems do not go away such escapes are the best medicines. They calm me down and rewire my brain to help me solve those problems better without having to resort to drugs or medication. If fulfilling my physical and spiritual inadequacies isn't enough, the trees reward me with the best tasting fruits in the world. I don't know if my best friend is proud of me but I'm certainly proud of it.

### **Changing roles**

In the wild, plants grow in groups and as groups. But, it is not a harmonious place, as many would have us believe. The forces at play are too minute for our naked eyes and too complicated for full comprehension. It is a very chaotic world out there with each organism trying to make the best of existing environment, light, soil, fertility and everything that Nature has to offer. But, there is order in chaos. No opportunity is lost; each microbe is ever ready to pounce and take over from another. This



balance hangs on an extremely fragile thread and it does not take much to break it. Only the fittest or adaptable survives. Plants are the results of millennia of selections and adaptations to take advantage of this chaotic world - forming symbiotic relationships with those that affect them directly or indirectly. Their primary function is to reproduce after their kind as instructed by the Creator. They try to produce as many seeds as they can in their lifespan. Since they are sedentary, their fruits are merely their clever decoys for tricking animals (man included) to help them disperse their seeds far and wide.

When we take them out and release them from their surroundings, change their original role and impose our expectations (big, juicy fruits) on them, then it becomes our sole responsibilities to provide them all their necessary requirements for them to perform to our specifications. Since confining them to containers is the most artificial situation they have ever been subjected to – limited soil, fertility, beneficial microbes, moisture and strange harsh environment – we must do our part to help them along.

### **Criticisms**

There are always two sides to every story and there will always be proponents and opponents to everything. That's perfectly natural and every man and woman is entitled to his and her opinions. Critics are not entirely wrong if they accuse us of playing God. But, I will argue that we can only play within the rules He sets. Besides, this form of gardening is not for everyone. Plants in gardens can survive for years without us moving a finger but in containers sometimes neglect for even a day is enough to kill them. Since growing them in containers is completely alien and new to them, we must be committed to learn everything about their physiology, morphology, their basic requirements, etceteras, before we can manipulate them to grow healthily and productively within the confines of our objectives. Another criticism is forcing plants to remain small by confining them to meager situation is cruel. It is only if and when these critics know how much energy, commitment and care that these gardeners must provide the plants, that they will have a better understanding and take off their hats to these Miniature Orchard gardeners. Patience and education are the main tools for gardeners to change the views of these critics. After practicing the art for over 20 years, I found these criticisms unfounded. I found it to be therapeutic, challenging, educational and rewarding. Although I am happy with my achievements Mother Nature often throws a few curved balls to remind me I'm still a student and there are many things beyond my control.

## **Before you start**

Before you start, make sure that this form of gardening is for you. You should have no problem if you have some technical training or have some experiences growing trees in containers. If you are a beginner and after reading Chapters 3, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 and you are still interested, start with just a plant or two and progress from there. If you like it then go forward and acquire more plants. If this form of gardening is not your cup of tea, then you have not expended a lot of energy and money into this hobby and it is easier to drop out. It is best to start with those whose fruits you and members of your family like to eat, fresh or processed – it will be easier to recruit volunteers or ask for help should you need one.

Let's face it; viewed exclusively from the monetary point; this is an economic suicide. It is definitely much cheaper to buy fruits than to grow them in Miniature Orchard. But, there are many things in life where money is not the deciding factor. It is very hard to put a monetary value on hobbies or the pleasure of tasting the best fruits in the entire world that you have nurtured with your own hands. Perhaps this falls under what economists call "Social Capital" – huge amount of money expended where the returns are indirect and debatable. So if monetary returns must exceed costs (materials and labor) then this hobby is not for you.

This form of gardening requires daily ritual during the growing season. Gardeners who plant fruit trees in the ground may need to perform periodic work now and then while Mother Nature does the rest. But in Miniature Orchard gardening, trees must be watered everyday – often twice a day during very hot days in July. Unless one is willing to tend to the trees everyday this hobby is definitely not for you. Timers and automatic watering devices are widely available and can be used to circumvent this problem. (Read chapter 5, Water.) Personally I find this forced daily routine a pleasurable break from the chaotic and hectic world where people are wolfing down meals on the run trying to chase after the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow just to make ends meet.

## **Tiny Weenie Fruits?**

Miniature Orchard does not mean growing some special genetic dwarfs. It involves regular fruit trees and shrubs that are grown in containers, trained and pruned into miniatures. All plants, field grown or containerized, can be thus trained. In the fields, it entails lots of work and vigilance. The most classical example of dwarfing fruit trees is grape growing. Under natural condition, a grape vine climbs tall trees to reach

sunlight. A yearly growth of eight meters is common. The vine eventually becomes as tall and as big as the big forest trees. Under domestication, viticulturists remove yearly growth every spring and train vines into short thick trunks of one meter with canopies confined within the trellis. Although the size of the vines is reduced by 90% or more the fruits remain the same size, often bigger.

Growing regular fruit trees in containers makes the job of miniaturization or dwarfing much easier. Miniature Orchard does not imply tiny weenie fruits but regular size fruits and berries produced on miniature plants. Herein lies the problem. In Bonsai and Penjing or to some people where every thing must be in proper ratios, big fruits on tiny trees are out of proportions and not in harmony. Others think it is incredible for tiny plants to bear big fruits.

### **Edible vs Palatable**

Many fruits may be edible but they may not be palatable as fresh fruits. Very often such terrible tasting fruits produce the best tasting and flavorful processed products. ‘One man’s meat is another man’s poison’ is very true. The write up on each fruit is my personal opinion and must never be taken as gospel truth. The best is for you to taste them yourself before accepting or rejecting my opinions, or better yet, form your own.

### **Simple Entertainment**

In our rat race society, people try to find instant outlets for their buildup tensions. Some turn to sports, others to drinks and drugs. Drugs and excessive hard drinks are destructive. A great many shell out lots of money for the latest complicated, modern energy guzzling technologies and gadgetries. This is rather amusing considering that besides getting drained, many are still not relaxed and rewarded at the end of the day while those who dabble with very simple toys or hobbies feel energized and contented. It is encouraging to see more and more people are rediscovering and turning to these simple, passive and rewarding activities. Gardening is one of these basic and simple outlets. Gardening, be it regular gardening in the fields or backyards, Penjing or Bonsai or Miniature Orchard is elementary, very simple and fundamental. There is no such thing as ‘Instant’ – progress takes time and patience. Yet, it is these traits that provide the immeasurable rewards. That goes to show that simplicity is still the best and speed does not matter.

## **Indoor Plants**

Almost every household has an indoor plant or two. Instead of growing the run of the mill materials, why not wow your guests with edible plants trained as Miniature Orchard? Less hardy or Tropical fruit trees may not grow outdoors but these can be grown indoors for those who are interested. It may be difficult to find a store that sells these materials but there are many types of fruits available in the grocery stores. (I have counted to 100 types of fruits sold in Edmonton.) Buy these and after eating, sow the seeds. Since this treatise deals with hardy outdoor plants only, less hardy plants that require spending some time or permanent residence indoors will not be discussed here.

## Chapter 2 - History and Use of Container Growing

The beginning of container growing may have been lost in antiquity. Allowing my imagination to run wild, I believe container growing was accidental. I remember my father bringing home young fruit trees in containers or he often planted newly rooted air-layered branches in containers until he had time to plant them out in the field or give them away. As far as my parents were concerned, container growing was a temporary thing and confined exclusively to superior selections. There were numerous occasions when they were too busy to plant the small fruit trees out into the field and these started to flower and produce fruits while they were still growing in their containers. Based on these experiences I believe that while foraging for food, one of our ancestors, most likely a woman, might have found a small plant that produced excellent eating fruits. She dug it out, placed it in a container with some soil and took it home for transplanting it closer to home. Once home, she might have forgotten or got too busy to plant it. With moisture from precipitation, the plant continued to grow much to the surprise of everyone. With that she discovered container growing.

People tend to associate The Hanging Garden of Babylon with container growing. There was no mention of containers at all. King Nebuchadnezzar II was merely building terraces on very steep hills for planting. The very lush growth gave the impression of a hanging garden. Pictographs of growing in containers were found in pyramids. Some dated back to 2000 BC. Ramese III had dates, olives and others grown in containers. Whether they were in transient or permanent is a conjecture<sup>(1)</sup>. In days gone by, practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine grew herbs in containers to take along on their visits to patients. The Romans were known to place plants growing in containers strategically at specific places to distract people from the dull architecture. Perhaps the greatest art of growing miniature plants in containers is the art of Penjing in China. This art restricted exclusively to the aristocrats was recorded in 200 AD. Penjing has two parts, Miniature Trees and Miniature Landscape. The former was later introduced to Japan where it became known as Bonsai, a name that most of us are more familiar with.

Chinese archaeologists unearthing the tomb of Prince Zhang Huai, built in 706 AD discovered pictorials of miniature fruit trees<sup>(2)</sup>. Although fruit trees were recorded, it is doubtful that the fruits were intended for eating since those aristocrats were always provided with the best, biggest

and juiciest fruits. The most classical case of growing plants in containers exclusively for eating their fruits was by King Louis XIV, also known as the Sun King. He was famous for his ability to serve oranges to his guests on any day of the year. In those days it was a great feat. To do so, he had all sorts of citruses growing in containers that were moved out in summer and moved into specially constructed buildings with glass roofs and walls in winter. These buildings were known as orangeries. The structure was later modified and simplified and came to be known as greenhouse.

Whether it was the Hanging Garden or orangeries, one thing was common; only the very rich or aristocrats had the luxury of having such an extensive or exquisite gardens. In the case of Penjing or Bonsai it was illegal for the poor to own one – they may have plants in containers but may not train them under the principles of the two arts. I do not know about the West but in the Orient it did not provide any incentive for the landless poor in the old days to plant fruit trees in the ground since legally any plant planted in the ground belonged to the landlord. To circumvent the problems of landlords laying claims to the fruits, many resorted to planting them in containers. Moreover, when they moved or got kicked out of the land, they could carry the plants with them. Those days are gone and the majority of the populace now lives in towns and cities. No matter how urbanized or modern society gets, people just cannot detach themselves from their roots – to be surrounded by vegetation. This urge gets stronger as we get cramped into tighter spaces. Today, it is difficult to find a house without a container grown plant. Those who have absolutely no access to outdoor gardens, grow some indoors. Even those with gardens still grow some plants in containers. If Ramese III was indeed growing dates and olives permanently in containers, then we are just reviving an ancient idea, perhaps shrinking the size of the plants to fit our physical capabilities as well as the ever shrinking smaller and limited space.

### **Why grow in containers?**

Different gardeners have different reasons for growing some plants in containers. Some of the reasons for growing in containers are given below.

### **Spirituality or escapism**

The modern rat race and fast pace society, heavily saturated with audio and visual pollutions or distractions, or unpleasant things happening at the work place every day, hour and minutes, result in a chaotic world

where too many things are out of control and affecting many negatively. People need some time out; time out to calm down, time out to seek and gain some control of their life. Silence, quietness and deliberate slowness – rare commodities in modern societies - are the key ingredients. Although plants are sedentary and have no vocal capabilities, yet they have an effective way of slowing people down. They have their own agenda and timetable, and cannot be forced. In their silence and slow pace they provide solace, peace and tranquility – the best avenues to escape from the maddening physical world. To me, Miniature Orchard increases the pleasures many folds since it provides not only for the soul but body too.

While critics may accuse Miniature Orchard gardeners as self-centered egoists, in actual fact Miniature Orchard gardeners are just trying to do the most important things in life – seeking physical and spiritual fulfillment by natural means. It is ironical that with more and more inventions to make life simpler, easier and save time, life gets more complicated and people seem to have less and less time. For most people it is rushing to work (or crawling along in traffic jams), wolfing down meals and rushing off for recreation or to attend boring and at times hypocritical social gatherings. Many are merely getting out of one mess into another, just different forms of fast pace, energy guzzling gadgets and entertainments. The end result is more physical and mental fatigue.

### **Growing Non-hardy plants**

Environment Canada classifies the Prairie Provinces under zones 0 to 3, having very short and harsh growing conditions of just 110 frost free days and long, bitterly cold winter. No tropical plants can grow here and many plants from the more moderate temperate zones cannot survive. But, there are many gardeners who want to grow these non-hardy plants. Reasons range from aesthetic to personal. To circumvent problems associated with such non-hardy plants gardeners grow them in containers in control environment. Indoor tropical plants are excellent examples.

### **Extending the season**

No matter where one is, there are plants that cannot be grown in one's area either because weather conditions or the soil are not suitable. On the prairie some plants cannot be grown because they are killed by late spring frosts or need a longer growing season or a longer fall to acclimatize for the winter or they simply cannot tolerate the cold. Growing these plants in containers allow gardeners to take advantage of the flexibility the practice offers. For me, this flexibility is the greatest

advantage of growing plants in containers. Plants can be moved indoors or provided needed protection from late as well as early frosts. Taking advantages of the hot days in spring and the Indian summer to lengthen the growing season give many marginally hardy plants a chance to harden up for winter. Those extra few days or weeks and the added winter protection that are easily provided to plants grown as Miniature Orchard allow me to grow plants that I would not been able to do so normally.

I have ample room to grow what I want in the ground but I do keep a few plants in containers for breeding purposes. They are thus grown either for convenience or they are less hardy materials with good genes that I need. I keep a few pots of gooseberries and other fruits thus trained. Another bonus is I find them pleasing and easier to work with as I can easily raise them to eye level for floral emasculation and pollination. Working at that level is a breeze compared to having to bend over for the simple yet clumsy operations.

### **Special growing conditions**

Gardeners who want to grow plants like epiphytes and acid-loving plants that require special growing conditions will find the flexibility of container growing a blessing. Most regions on the prairie are too alkaline for acid loving plants. Although most books and experts call for soil amendments with liberal use of peat moss and acidic fertilizers and chemicals, I find that is easier said than done especially on the Black soil of Central Alberta or stiff clayey alkaline and saline soil of Brooks. I find it is much easier to mix up growing media for these plants since little is required in container growing. The pH of planting media in containers is much easier to reduce and maintain. Using containers I grew beautiful blueberries, crowberries and lingonberries. I mixed peat moss with some compost and soil, and then fertigate with acidic complete fertilizers every now and then. In spring and summer, I give them a dose of Ammonium sulfate and citric acid to keep the pH low.

Conversely, gardeners who garden in very acidic soil will find container growing to be a better alternative than adding massive amount of lime to their garden. I don't grow epiphytes but those who do have very limited choices besides growing these in containers.

### **Shortage of land**

As more and more people are moving into urban settings, land is paved over with asphalts and concrete to cater to the demands for housing, working offices, manufacture, transportation and recreation. With sky



rocketing land prices and politicians trying to cater to every need, green spaces for those fortunate enough to own their own houses are getting smaller and smaller. Many have no access to a garden to have the pleasure of gardening on soil. This situation is a good recipe for container growing. The escalating food prices and frequent recalls due to contaminations are catalyst to the latest trend in edible landscaping. For some people gardening on rooftops and balconies are the only option. Examples can be found in every city. But a word of caution is necessary – please check with landlord or contractors on load capacity – to make sure that the weight limits of the structures are observed.

### **Indoor landscaping & Living Pantry**

I guess the bleak colorless winter is the catalyst for indoor landscaping among people living in temperate zones or those in crowded cities where the landscape is basically concrete, asphalt, steel and glass. Plants make the place more habitable. Besides, some plants also clean up pollutants in the air and soil. Almost every household has a pot or two of indoor plants. Some gardeners take their hobby very seriously, going to great lengths and expanses in providing extra lights.

With a rapid growing diversity in population through immigration and many going abroad for vacations, more and more people are exposed to food and cuisines that they would not have tasted. Demands for condiments, spices and herbs to prepare such acquired exotic delicacies induce merchants to import them for sale in major towns and cities. Although available throughout the year, these dried or processed materials are poor substitutes for fresh stuffs. Oil and other aromatic components of herbs and spices are volatile and drying and storing result in very poor qualities.

We love Kaffir lime and imagine our happiness when we first saw the leaves on sale. Much to our disappointment, those dried leaves were so distant from the fresh stuff that we thought they were something else. So, to avoid any more disappointment, I grow my own. Some fresh herbs are available in stores but they may be very seasonal. There is no denying that some herbs are just as good when they are dried but for most, fresh is hard to beat. These are the ones renegade gardeners grow indoors. Kaffir lime, calamondin oranges, curry plant, Vietnamese basil, turmeric and mint are some of the indoor plants that I grow. These plants not only served as lovely indoor plants but are excellent conversation topics and much envied by friends and relatives who know them.

## **Softening Effects**

Hard landscapes; waterscape, decks, patios and gazebos; are the fastest growing industries in the outdoor landscape business. By themselves, these places of relaxation and social gathering can be very harsh and naked, consisting of barren structures of wood, lumber or stones. Living plants strategically placed will make sitting or entertaining in such an environment a much more pleasing and relaxing experience to unwind after a hard day work. Besides wowing guests, these planters serve as conversation topics and can bring pride and joy to the hosts.

Most people plant leafy or flowering ornamentals. I don't have any of these hard landscapes but if I do I want to have my cake and eat it too. An edible landscape is more pleasing and satisfying. Edible landscape is not only gentle to my eyes but feeds my body as well – it is great to know that I can grow some of my own food even in the hardest and harshest situation.

## **Wider range of fruits**

Miniatures trees take up less space allowing gardeners to plant more types and selections. For the space for one big tree, gardeners can grow many small trees. Of course the down side is these small trees do not produce as many fruits as a single large tree. (It should be noted that more often than not the excess fruits from one single big tree are a burden for many gardeners.)

## **Instant Landscape**

The portability of plants grown in containers makes them suitable for instant landscaping. Very often plants are required to decorate places such as halls, corridors, stages, and etcetera, for special functions. There are nurseries that grow ornamentals just for such demands. Miniature Orchard can serve the same function although I am not too sure that the plants will be returned with fruits intact. (Even the shape of the trees may change as people nip off branches for propagation.)

Refernces:

(1) Bonsai, Its Art, Science, History and Philosophy – Deborah R. Koreshoff. 1984

(2) Penjing, The Chinese Art of Miniature Gardens – Hu Yunhua 1982

You have reached the end of this sample

Want to keep reading?

You can buy this book at **PageMasterPublishing.ca/Shop**

To find more books by Canadian authors or inquire about publishing your own book, contact PageMaster at:

**PageMaster Publication Services Inc.**

11340 - 120 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T5G 0W5

books@pagemaster.ca

780-425-9303