

Small Can Be Bountiful!

Most of us think we can't raise more than a tomato plant or two because we have so little of the sunny space a garden requires. I had a difficult time believing one could have a productive garden in a square yard. In my experience, the person with hands on the tiller planted wide and wider. But truly a small plot can work!

For example, if you use raised beds the cost of whose components can be amortized over several seasons, you can plant closely and successfully. The depth of friable soil helps retain moisture and provides plenty of root space. They are wonderful for tomatoes and more.

Months ago I mentioned that commercial gardeners in Asia and Europe had been grafting tomatoes for decades and this may be an idea local gardeners are tempted to try. The benefit of doing it at all is that you get strength and disease resistance from a modern hybrid rootstock and wonderful taste from the heritage scion. There is nothing arcane about grafting once you brace yourself for cutting off the top of your seedling replacing it with the removed top of a different cultivar.

Usually the cuts are made at an angle so they'll fit together snugly and are wound with something to keep them in place. That soft sort of adhesive tape might work. As a child I saw a newspaper collar wrapped with twine but that was on an apple tree with tougher body parts. Sucker sticks or toothpicks might support the graft sufficiently, depending on the size of your stems.

Curiously in the 2009 Totally Tomatoes catalog with its hundreds of tomatoes both old and new, I could find no advice about combining the two. There are so many extra seeds in a packet, it might be fun to try grafting. It is said that tomatoes are the favorite home garden project although lots of other delicious vegetables are easier to grow. This particular catalog has pages of peppers from cool to scorching as well as fashionable purple cauliflower, onions, squash, herbs. One conversation starter for a planter might be 'Purple flash' ornamental pepper. The leaves are nearly black with lots of purple and the shiny peppers are black. Also striking in a planter would be pepper 'Nosegay', with too hot to eat multicolored fruit.

CABBAGES & KINGS:

"How to enjoy the tropics without driving to Florida." If you are winter weary and longing for warm breezes and waving palms, why not plan for a tropical garden right here in Virginia? I have a title but have not seen "Hot Plants for Cool Climates: Gardening With Tropicals in Temperate Zones" by Dennis Schrader who has a wholesale nursery on Long Island, a part of cold New York State warmed by Long Island Sound. This nursery features big bold plants with attention-grabbing textures- such as a grove of banana trees?

Schrader suggests Siam Ruby banana, sporting yellow marked reddish leaves. Wonderful anywhere are gingers, noted for their exquisite fragrance. For gardeners with a sheltered microclimate or for those willing to dig and store there are splendid Alocasia. One of these elephant ears actually resembles a stingray fish and is appropriately called 'stingray'.

Brent & Becky's Bulbs has an Alocasia for shade, *A. amazonica*, tall dark and glossy with astonishing white veins. It would prompt you to create a tropical hideaway with hammock.

AND A NON-GREEN TREND

For the third time in over 20 years a consortium of Bay States are making resolutions about cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay. It won't be possible if development continues at the current pace – more people, more run-off. With a recession on the horizon, the Bay may have a chance to stabilize, although, failing to “Save the Bay” when times were good, relatively speaking, doesn't suggest that sentiment will move from bumper sticker to action any year soon.