

Here We **grow**

URBAN FARMING TAKES ROOT IN SAN DIEGO

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COURTESY GREENSCAPED BUILDINGS



COURTESY URBAN PLANTATIONS

PHOTOS THIS PAGE
 TOP: Jim Mumford's first "green roof" installation
 BOTTOM: Dwarf citrus tree with herbs in planter
 RIGHT: Dwarf fig tree with herbs in planter

OPPOSITE PAGE
 TOP: Jim Mumford and his "living wall" at Mario Batalia's Pizzeria Mozza
 BOTTOM: "Living wall" installation

ORANGE YOU SMART

Even certain citrus trees can grow well in urban settings. (To maximize space, plant mini herb gardens around the bases of potted trees.) Karen Contreras recommends semi-dwarf citrus of the smaller, "determinate" varieties. Their "indeterminate" cousins can grow to eight feet tall and, in certain urban locales, bother neighbors on the floor above.

Growing your own vegetables no longer requires a backyard. If you have a patio or a balcony and a big appetite for fresh produce, you might try your hand at urban farming, a trend that's getting green thumbs up from city slickers and condo-dwellers countywide.

"There is no space too small for a garden," says Karen Contreras of Urban Plantations, a North Park company that specializes in edible landscaping for urban environments. "As long as you have some sun, the right plant choices, and you keep your garden watered, you can experience the satisfaction of growing food at home."

Container gardens provide an easy and often inexpensive solution for transforming your small outdoor space into an edible bounty.

Just like in more bucolic settings, urban farming requires protecting sensitive foliage from overexposure, while maximizing rays for plants that thrive in the sun. And because even the smallest balconies can have extreme microclimates, Contreras says strategic placement of planter boxes and flower pots is crucial. One trick is to create small groups of pots with plants of different heights, enabling you to determine which varieties get the most shade. Another is to place larger pots on rollers to simplify moving them depending upon weather conditions.

"Elements to consider are wind, heat, sun and shade," Contreras says. She suggests growing peppers, eggplants and herbs in sun-drenched locations. For shadier areas, try lettuces, chards, mints, potatoes and peas.



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ANOTHER TRICK IN THE WALL

When there's no space on the ground, Jim Mumford plants on the walls and the roof. His Kearny Mesa-based company, Good Earth Plant Company, has been providing plantscaping services for San Diego homeowners and businesses for more than 30 years. Today, Mumford's new venture, GreenScaped Buildings, also creates "green roofs" and "living walls," giving life to otherwise inanimate objects.

Plants living on GreenScaped "green roofs" don't spread roots down through the shingles. Rather, they are planted in soil in modular trays, which protect roofs from the sun and capture rainwater, which would otherwise flow to storm drains.

Green roofs also provide insulation, says Mumford, but they are not practical for everyone (especially if you live in a high-rise and don't have your own roof). Green walls, on the other hand, can be built in many more places and for a fraction of the cost—Mumford's designs start at \$50 per square-foot, with a minimum

order of \$150.

To construct green walls, Mumford's team uses one or multiple customized modular trays, which are intertwined by an irrigation system that allows water to flow across the entire structure.

With consideration for San Diego's climate, Mumford generally outfits exterior walls with native plants (the next best thing to habitat restoration) and succulents, which help with water conservation.

"Plus, we can create 'living art' with the myriad of patterns and architectural features that succulents possess," Mumford says.

Confirming the popularity of a recent trend toward "edible walls," which actually produce vegetables to eat, the Food Network's *Iron Chef America* star Mario Batali recently contracted a Mumford original for his Hollywood hotspot, Pizzeria Mozza. The 72-square-foot facade blooms with rosemary, parsley, mint, endive, Chinese celery, chicory, sage and edible geraniums.



Growing heavier crops will require more development on Mumford's part. Tomatoes weigh so much that they can pull right out of the wall; corn and root crops remain out of the question due to the root-depth limitations of the wall design.

Despite the challenges, however, local demand for Mumford's edible walls, and urban farming in general, continues to grow. ■