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# Growing Optimism: Edible Gardens In Small Spaces With Indira Naidoo

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While a big backyard or sprawling country acreage might be the pick of the crop for many people, it's important not to underestimate the amount of food that you can grow in the smallest of spaces. Whether you have a balcony, patio or neglected corner of the yard you can transform nearly any space into an abundant source of sustainable homegrown food.

From [tasty tomatoes](#), to [leafy greens](#) and [fragrant herbs](#) there's so much joy to be found in picking your own produce for the next meal. And it's one small action that you can take to create positive change on a larger scale. Media personality and bestselling author of *The Edible Balcony* and *The Edible City* Indira Naidoo shares her advice on how to start your own edible garden.

### Look at the sunlight

The first step is to observe the sunlight in your chosen space. Indira says it's important to know which direction your garden faces, where the sun sets and rises, and how much sunlight falls on the space during the day. "That is going to determine everything that you can do or can't do," says Indira. "Most plants, particularly most edible plants, need six to seven hours of sunlight every day. A lot of people wouldn't really know how much light is hitting their courtyard or their balcony or their backyard, so it's important first to work that out. Then, once you've worked out how much light you get, you can decide what sort of plants to plant."

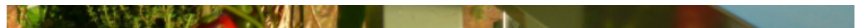
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Indira's inner city balcony receives plenty of sunlight from the north which provides ideal growing conditions for her pot plants. "I can grow almost everything I want to grow because I get about 10 to 12 hours of sunlight on my balcony, which is fantastic. If you're west-facing you'll get lots of afternoon hot light and very little light in the morning, and that would be good for things like chillies, tomatoes and lemons," says Indira.

If you're someone who has quite a shaded space, people are often surprised that they can still grow things. You wouldn't be able to grow tomatoes, chillies and lemons, but you could grow lettuces and mint – the sorts of things that don't like hot heat. Grow according to the light and the sunlight that you get in your space."

### **Start small and create a daily routine**

Indira suggests that it's best to start small. "People can go and buy lots of new plants and put in lots of seeds, and then they get overwhelmed because they've put in too much and they can't manage it. The important thing is to start small and just start with a few herbs and a few lettuces. See how much time that takes and how easy it is for you to manage, especially for a new gardener. As you get more confident then you can expand into greens, tomatoes, carrots and other things," says Indira.

The trick to maintaining a small kitchen garden is to regularly tend to your garden and pot plants. But it doesn't need to be time consuming or hard work. According to Indira just 10 minutes a day will ensure you have healthy and productive plants. "I usually just spend ten minutes a day on my garden, and on my balcony I've got about 20 pots. That is enough to manage in that time. It's really important to think how much realistic time can I set aside every day, and put in the number of plants and pots accordingly," says Indira.



Indira encourages people to incorporate their edible garden into the everyday routine so it becomes part of a way of life. "Ten minutes a day for me is also equivalent to a meditation as well. When I go and water my garden I also have my cup of tea out on the balcony. It's all part of the way I begin my day" says Indira.

### **Stepping stone**

Indira says that growing fruit and vegetables isn't just about the fresh, healthy food you'll be able to put on the kitchen table. "For me, gardening has helped me connect with nature and the environment. Gardening has really helped me to think of nature differently – that humans are part of nature rather than being separate from it."

As a climate change campaigner, she also noticed a shift in her perspective when she first started tending to her pot plants on the balcony. "I remember what happened to me when I started growing. Suddenly every day when I'd wake up and look at the weather it

when I started growing. Suddenly every day when I'd wake up and look at the weather it wasn't about should I carry an umbrella or carry a cardigan to work, it was, 'Oh, do I need to water the plants extra today?' or pull them away from the balcony because there's going to be a storm or a wind."

"Suddenly the weather wasn't about me – the weather and the climate was about my plants and the broader natural world around me. That was a really important transition for me and I thought maybe that could be a stepping stone for other people who live a similar urban lifestyle to me," says Indira.

#### Growing optimism

Indira says her flourishing balcony garden on the sixteenth floor gave her the passion and drive to encourage other people to grow their own food – no matter how big or small the space. Aside from the joy of being able to pick your own food, she sees it as a fundamental way for people from all walks of life to make a difference in creating a sustainable future on a personal and global level.

"IT'S A VERY POWERFUL THING BECAUSE YOU'RE GIVING PEOPLE SOMETHING PRACTICAL THEY CAN DO THAT WILL LEAD TO PERSONAL GROWTH AND CHANGE IN AWARENESS. YOU'RE ALSO GIVING THEM SOMETHING THAT, IN THEIR SMALL WAY, IMPROVES THEIR LIFE. THE REWARDS AND SATISFACTION AND REAL LIFE CHANGE I SEE ON A DAILY BASIS IS JUST UNBELIEVABLE. IT JUST FILLS ME WITH MORE HOPE AND OPTIMISM."

- SAYS INDIRA.

To find out more about edible gardening in small spaces visit:  
[www.theediblebalcony.com.au](http://www.theediblebalcony.com.au).

*Justine McClymont is a freelance writer and content writer based on the NSW north coast. She writes about environment, sustainability, food, farming and gardening. You can find her at [www.justinemcclymont.com](http://www.justinemcclymont.com) and [www.facebook.com/justinemcclymontwriter](https://www.facebook.com/justinemcclymontwriter).*

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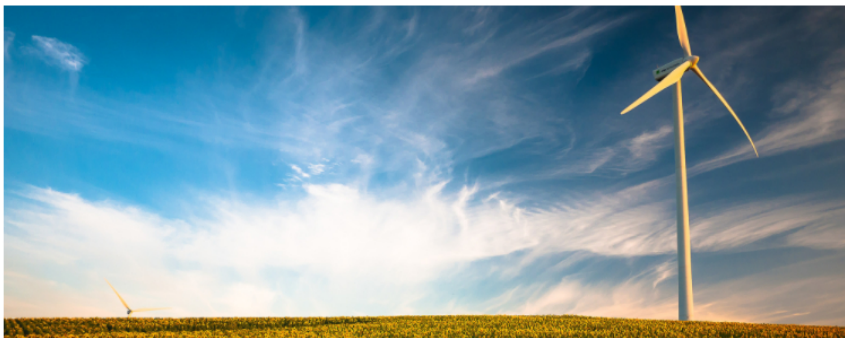


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**Janice Doyle**

Hah, was puzzling about the north-facing balcony providing 10-12 hours of sunlight, then I realized this is Australia, not North America! Great article, though.

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