



Get winter veggies from your own garden!

The monsoon is prolonged this year. It is mid September – officially autumn, but the floating clouds seem inclined to stay a few more days at least.

Dear horticulture enthusiasts, it is high time we put our minds and hands together for the next season. It is time to give new life to the monsoon battered plants, plots and containers and get those ready for the next batch of planting in the upcoming season. Usually in our urban gardening approach, we go for popular and easy to grow kind of vegetables like sheem/beans – regular winter and all season varieties like borboti/long beans, gourds and cucumber (regular lau, mishiti kumra, korola), radish/mula, begun/egg plants, tomato, potato, dherosh/okras, cabbages, green chillies, lettuce etc. Considering our limitations of urban gardening, today I shall focus my discussion to vegetables that are easy to grow.

The first thing to do is to clean the garden area, the floor/soil beds of old worn out plants and fallen leaves, then disinfecting the area with a sprinkle of DDT liquid or any pesticide and allow the area to dry for the next two to three days.

During the period, you may empty the existing containers and pile up the accumulated soil in one dry place and let it get enough sunlight. Next, add natural dry fertiliser/livestock manure (at least one third the volume of the existing soil) to have a nutrient full soil for the new batch of plants. Keep the soil under the sun for a few more days, and shuffle the soil from time to time to have a fluffy texture. Now, the soil is ready to be moved to the containers to prepare the beds. If you go for container

gardening/roof gardening, then fill the containers, leaving a few inches free at the top – this space will be required to add new batches of fertiliser during the season and also for convenience of watering and easy breathing of the plants.

By this time, you need to collect the seeds, seedlings/saplings of your choice from the nurseries and the required numbers of containers to accommodate those. Here, I would recommend the earthen containers – not the plastic ones. And those who want to cultivate seeds of leafy vegetables – shaak or cultivate potatoes, peas and nuts (depending on the space of your garden), you may go for used bathtubs or can make similar or square shaped cement/permanent frames or from the used bamboos/timber pieces of the construction sites.

Those who love innovative ideas, I would suggest them to go for the old native boats (from the outskirts of the city). I am sure this will give a new dimension to gardening.

Large and wide-bodied containers are needed for leafy vegetables like lalshak/red celery, palong/spinach and also for potatoes or peanuts. These types of large containers like boats and bathtubs will be suitable and interesting to try out.

I shall narrate the simplest way of cultivating potato in any container, even in the supermarket supplied shopping bags!

Check out your potato basket in the kitchen – you will notice that sprouts are pushing up from different corners of their bodies. Now carefully cut those to pieces and preserve in a dry place. In one bathtub, you can make two rows. Now, place those sprout cuts at a distance of 7/8 inches, and cover those with soil. After this, cover the area with newspaper sheets, or with a layer of hay/khor at the top.

In the next few days young leaves will sprout. Let them grow up to a few inches – now pull the soil up from both sides by keeping the saplings at the middle. This will create a narrow canal in between the rows. For bag-cultivation, it will be good to make holes around the body of the bags and make the soil base light to get the desired result. Two episodes of fertiliser will be required in between the rows with regular light watering (without clogging). After 2½ months or so you will be excited to harvest fresh potatoes from your own garden!

These days, gardening is easy as young seedling/saplings are readily available at most nurseries. For climbing plants, you need to first plant the saplings in bigger containers like full or half drums. After a few days, you need to support them with bamboo sticks and have them grow well with required water and care. Let them settle down in the machas – flat or upright arrangement with bamboo or other framed

supports.

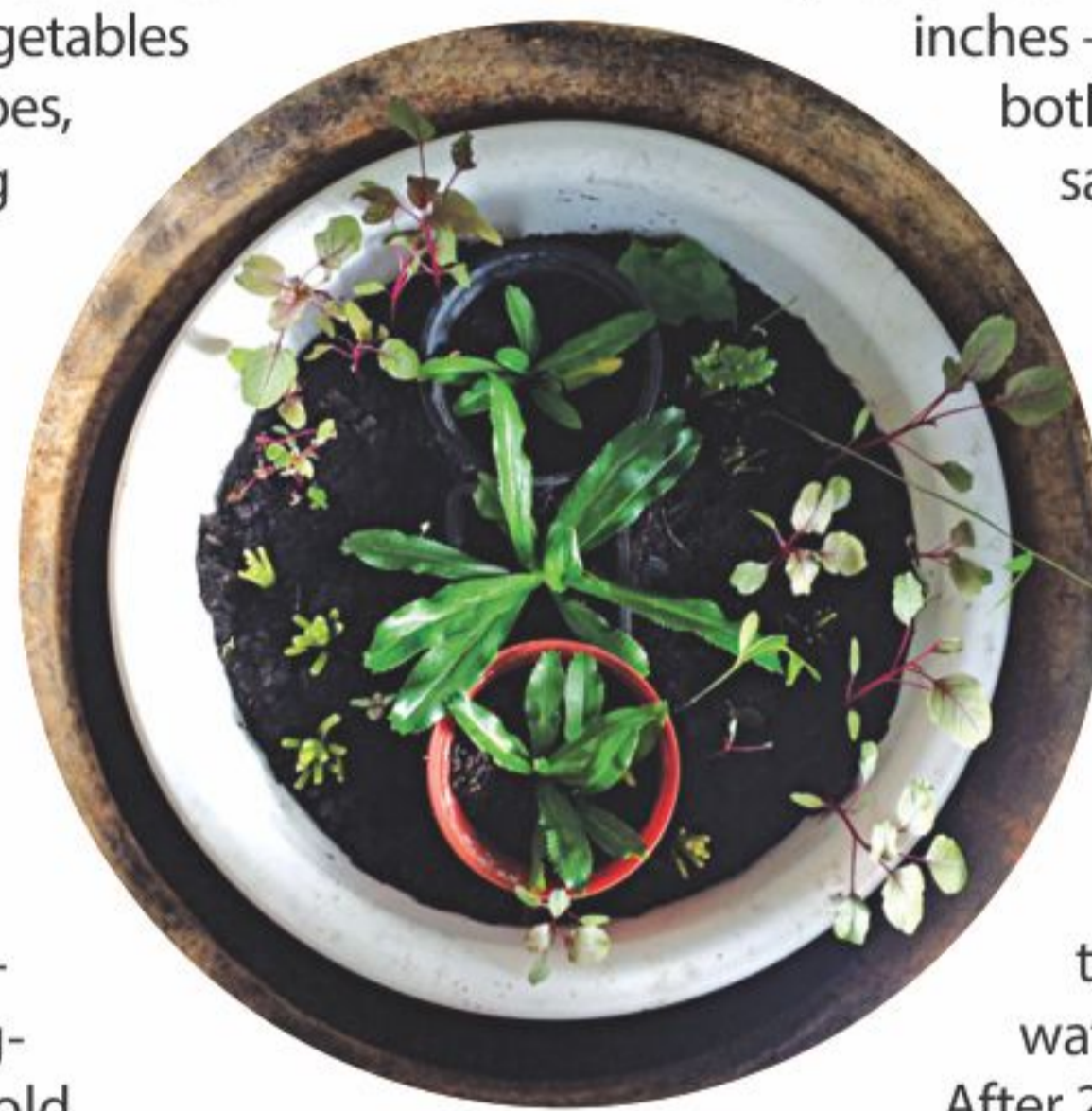
For the roof top gardener, it is essential to water your plants every day (depending on the nature of the day. In those real hot days, you may require two times of watering – actually the moisture level of the soil will indicate the water requirement. Usually, over-watering damages the gardening effort of the new gardener. This way, plant your vegetables like tomato, eggplants, capsicums or green chillies, in medium sized containers – one in each in the middle.

After two-three weeks, you can see the plant well settled in their new homes! Let them grow this way, and in between, feed those pinches of fertiliser -TSP or any other type. I prefer dry cow-dung mixed with the soil base. While doing this, carefully shuffle the soil so that sun light can pierce inside the soil base and it gets lighter. Do not allow the soil to get into tight lumps with everyday watering or so.

Please remember to weed – clean the fallen/dry leaves and dead wood branches in regularly, and check the health of the leaves and plants from time to time. Spray a little amount of insecticides once or twice in the season and use natural means like ashes (chai) or dry leaves of neem to keep the ants and other bugs away. One more piece of advice for the garden lovers, raise your plants with the same care and affection you have for your children.

Please share your thoughts, stories and love for plants, gardens, and greenery in general with Star Lifestyle. Mail us at lifestyleds@yahoo.com and your letters will be forwarded to the columnist.

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