

Book has tips on growing vegetables in containers

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Millions of us grew vegetables in 2009, and retail nurseries, publishers and manufacturers of garden products clearly believe the trend will not abate in 2010.

In response to a potential audience that includes some 41 million households (according to stats from the Garden Writers Association Foundation), retailers are stocking aisles with new varieties of herbs and vegetables as well as compact selections suitable for small-space gardening.

The range of containers in which to grow vegetables has expanded, too. From classical glazed and footed urns and upside-down tomato and pepper baskets to \$5 party tubs drilled with drainage holes, mixed containers that supply food as well as ornamentation top today's gardening trends.

A Georgia landscape architect and author of four books on container gardening, Pamela Crawford, recently published a colorful how-to manual that addresses the questions of beginner gardeners as well as longtime gardeners intrigued by the idea of combo containers whose "thrillers" are vegetable plants.

"Easy Container Combos: Vegetables & Flowers" (Color Garden Publishing, \$19.95) is more, however, than an idea book. Crawford tested 1,768 plants in 221 containers; 1,376 failed.

She faults her own lack of knowledge about vegetables

— Crawford is a lifelong flower gardener — for most of the problems.

But she also says she could find no research about how vegetable plants responded to being raised in containers.

"Everything we did (for this project) was pioneering," says Crawford. "I could find no information on the subject. The plant tags for vegetables don't say how tall they get. There's no information about how big a pot you need. It's a whole new concept."

Once Crawford teamed with Lois Chaplin of Alabama-based Bonnie Plants (which supplies vegetable transplants to some Home Depot and Lowe's stores), her experiments went much better. The book details 18 common vegetables that are easy to grow in containers and seven that are difficult to cultivate in containers or just plain difficult.

"I tried to pinpoint the vegetables that will be in garden centers this spring," Crawford says, to coincide with the publication of her book.

The author shows you a wide variety of large, mature planters combining vegetables with flowering ornamentals, and she also shows you her mistakes — established pots that do not meet her beauty standards for container gardening.

She supplies cultural information based on her own trials, including problems a home gardener may encounter and their remedies.

The book is for sale at Home Depot, Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com.

