

The odds are against you if you have a small, hilly, or shaded lot and you want to grow vegetables. But you can build a portable growing unit that can be moved around to catch pockets of sun at different times of the season. A seven-tier design, for example, can accommodate six-foot rows of spinach, basil, lettuce, radishes, green onions, and, on the bottom deck, a planting of bush cucumbers. Use only treated, rot resistant lumber for these units.

A roll of black plastic, stapled along the top, can be unrolled to shield plants on hot days and to protect them when frost threatens. To provide adequate drainage, be sure to drill holes in the base of each trough every few inches and cover with at least an inch of gravel.

To make the mini-garden more portable, use lightweight, commercially prepared soil mixes. Ordinary garden soil will usually pack down and become too heavy for container culture. Also, be sure to add small casters fastened to the corners of the unit to make it easier to move around.

As with any container garden, this mobile unit will need frequent watering. Try to locate it where it can be conveniently watered every day. Or you might try adding an automatic drip watering system to make the job even more efficient. Although the mobile garden unit is built to last for years, you'll have the best luck if the soil mix is changed--in part or completely--each planting season.