

Getting Started With

Greenhouse Gardening

From rooftops to cold-weather zones, three gardeners show you how they've used compact greenhouses to create thriving gardens.

by DEBBIE WOLFE

Rooftop Ready

A beginner used a greenhouse in the sky to create a bounty of produce.

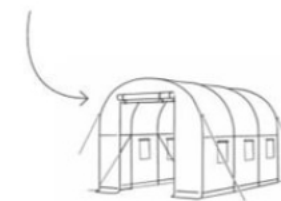
When **Melissa Geurts** moved into a Jersey City, NJ, apartment with rooftop access, she had one basic goal: grow something—anything. Then her green thumb kicked in. Despite her having no prior gardening experience, one successful lettuce bed turned into a greenhouse filled with strawberries, eggplant, potatoes, and more. “When I was little, I spent hours running through the fields on my grandma’s farm,” she says. “My rooftop gardening felt like an attempt to reconnect with that feeling.” Using a basic greenhouse and supplies bought online, Melissa began to learn through trial and error how much could thrive in a compact covered space. “My grandma would have laughed at some of my mistakes, but I think she’d be proud,” she says.

Melissa Geurts (@melissageurts) is group executive creative director at *Good Housekeeping* and a rooftop gardening enthusiast.

Mike Garten, prop styling by Alex Mata; illustration by Melissa Geurts/AL



WATCH AND LEARN. Check plants daily to see what they need; watering and trimming at the right times can make all the difference in small spaces.



GET THE GREENHOUSE
TANGJEAMER 10' X 7' X 7"
WALK-IN HEAVY-DUTY
TUNNEL GREENHOUSE, \$87,
WALMART.COM

START WITH SIMPLE CROPS.

Choose easy-to-grow vegetables like lettuce, scallions, strawberries, and potatoes in varieties that reward consistent care and don't demand perfect conditions.

PROTECT PLANTS FROM RAIN AND WIND.

Set up your greenhouse in a spot that will keep plants sheltered from heavy rain and strong winds, creating a more stable growing environment.



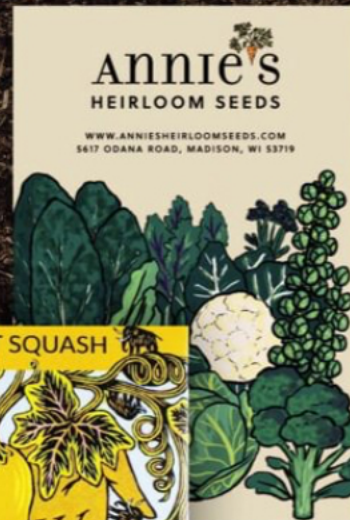
WHEN-TO-GROW GUIDE



Root Vegetables

Plant in **March**—radishes, carrots, and beets can go into beds or deep containers now. They are hardy and sprout quickly.

SOW THE MAGIC FRENCH BREAKFAST RADISH TAROT SEED PACKET, SOWTHEMAGIC.COM



Peas

Early March—snap peas and snow peas thrive in cool temps and climb beautifully. Get them in early for a sweet harvest.

ANNIE'S HEIRLOOM SEEDS ANNIE'S KALE MIX, ANNIESHEIRLOOMSEEDS.COM



Cool-Weather Greens

Sow spinach, kale, lettuce, and chard in **March**—they love the chill and will take off fast in a greenhouse.

HUDSON VALLEY SEED CO HONEYNUT SQUASH, HUDSONVALLEYSEED.COM

Flowers (Pollinator-Friendly!)

Start marigolds, zinnias, nasturtiums, and cosmos **indoors in April**; it works wonderfully, and they will bring bees to your rooftop garden later.

HUDSON VALLEY SEED CO GOOD BUG BLOOMS, HUDSONVALLEYSEED.COM



Tomatoes and Peppers

Start seeds **indoors in March**, then transplant them in late April or early May. Give them warmth to germinate and then harden off once nights remain above 50°F.

SERENISEED ORGANIC TOMATO SEEDS, SERENISEED.COM



GARDEN SMARTS
For our list of low-maintenance perennial flowers, scan here.



The Perfect Fit

A small yard was no obstacle for this enthusiastic gardener.

An 8' x 10' greenhouse was just right for **Laura Boissonnault's** small suburban lot in southern New Jersey, just outside Philadelphia. The structure gives her space to start seeds early, overwinter treasured plants, and even grow citrus through the colder months. After extensive research, she chose the Parkside model from BC Greenhouse because, she says, it “checked all the boxes in affordability, function, and beauty.” Delivered as a kit, the greenhouse became a project she and her husband assembled over several weeks. “One of my requirements was for it to be able to handle wind and snow,” she explains. Now, years later, Laura wouldn't change a thing and calls it “one of the best additions we have made.”

Laura Boissonnault (@howsitgrowingnj, @gardenshopwoodbury) is a master gardener. She and her husband are planning to open a garden shop (The Garden Shop of Woodbury) in Woodbury, NJ, this year.



PLAN FOR SUN AND SHADE.

Laura positioned her greenhouse beneath a maple tree, which provides welcome shade during the hottest summer days while allowing more sun and warmth in winter, after the leaves have dropped.

KEEP WATER NEARBY.

For a year-round greenhouse, easy water access is a must. Laura and her husband installed a sink inside the structure that helps with watering, potting, and general cleanup, especially during the busy seed-starting season.



HEAT STRATEGICALLY.

To protect tender plants, Laura relies on a small greenhouse-rated heater with a thermostat. She runs it only on the coldest nights; as she explains, it “takes the edge off” and provides just enough warmth for overwintering citrus without excessive energy use.



GET THE GREENHOUSE
BC GREENHOUSE BUILDERS
PARKSIDE GREENHOUSE,
\$12,495, BCGREENHOUSES.COM



Four-Season Solution

How one gardener keeps produce thriving all year.

Gardening author **Niki Jabbour**, who lives in Nova Scotia, has found success with one of the simplest greenhouse types, a cold frame. Typically a low, boxlike structure with a clear lid that traps heat from the sun, a cold frame shields plants from frigid temperatures in winter and protects them from pests and heat during other seasons. Over the years, Niki has discovered that simple wooden frames (she prefers untreated hemlock) topped with clear polycarbonate offer the best insulation and performance. Today her cold frames allow her to harvest vegetables year-round. In early summer, a fast-growing cover crop like buckwheat helps build the soil; by late summer she's sowing carrots, beets, and winter radishes. In fall, she plants spinach, lettuce, and other cold-hardy greens. Even in the depths of winter, there's no need for a heated greenhouse. "Opening a cold frame in February to pull some carrots or beets brings me so much joy," she says.

Niki Jabbour (savvygardening.com) is the author of four books, including *Growing Under Cover* and *The Year-Round Vegetable Gardener*, and a two-time winner of the *American Horticultural Society Book Award*.



FACE SOUTH.

"Place a cold frame in a spot that receives full sun," Niki advises. She recommends facing frames south and sheltering them from prevailing winds to create a warmer, more stable growing environment.

CHOOSE COLD-HARDY VEGETABLES.

Niki recommends cool-season crops such as kale, carrots, lettuce, beets, scallions, and parsley because they are reliable choices for extended harvests.

VENT DURING MILD WEATHER.

Niki props open the top when daytime temperatures rise above 40°F to prevent overheating, then closes it again later in the day.



GET THE GREENHOUSE
FOR SIMILAR:
VEGRUG COLD FRAME,
\$135, WILLIAMS SONOMA



Courtesy of Niki Jabbour; illustration by Melissa Geurts/Al.

Affordable and Portable

Blending modern style with practical functionality, this compact and durable shelter is perfect for patios, balconies, or sunrooms.

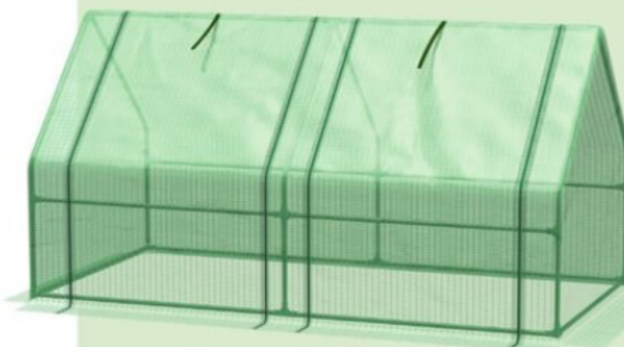
IKEA AKERBAR, \$40, IKEA



Outdoor Protection

This easy-to-assemble greenhouse provides affordable shelter with large zippered doors and a durable PE cover.

OUTSUNNY MINI GREENHOUSE PORTABLE HOT HOUSE, \$39, HOME DEPOT



GREAT GREENHOUSES



Mid-priced Pick

UV-blocking panels and a vent and gutter system are highlights of this affordable option.

GARVEE ALUMINUM-FRAMED OUTDOOR POLYCARBONATE GREENHOUSE, FROM \$390, GARVEE.COM



Gardening Must-Haves

SLEEK SPOUT

The **Root & Vessel Indoor Watering Can** (above) blends minimalist style with practical precision. Its slender spout and balanced grip make watering houseplants neat, controlled, and effortless.

\$14, AMAZON

HEAT FAN

The **BioGreen Electric Greenhouse Heater & Fan** delivers heat with a manual summer-winter thermostat, protecting plants in cool weather while circulating air for even temperature control.

\$150, BIOGREEN-PRODUCTS.COM

SEED STARTERS

The **Vego Garden Standard 1020 Germination Cell Bundle** makes sowing and rooting easy and supports early growth.

\$100, VEGOGARDEN.COM

TIDY TRAY

Johnny's Soil Blocking and Potting Tray helps contain messes during seed starting and potting tasks to keep workspaces clean.

\$30, JOHNNYSEEDS.COM

HOT SEAT

The **Vivosun Seedling Heat Mat and Digital Thermostat Combo Set** nurtures seeds and cuttings with consistent heat and precise temp control for faster, healthier germination.

FROM \$26, AMAZON