

May 2017

# URBAN *gardener*

*Bring Life*  
to your Apartment.

## Apartment Gardening Ideas

FIND OUT WHAT'S POSSIBLE WITH YOUR  
APARTMENT OR PATIO

plus!

Inspiration to spark  
your own **creative** ideas.

**Make It Yourself.**

Dozens of options  
on how to make your  
garden a reality.





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## Want More?

Check out our author's blogs, more DIY projects, and helpful tips at [www.urbangardener.com](http://www.urbangardener.com).

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# DIY Network's Apartment Gardening Tips

By Julie Martens Forney

## Light Levels

The most important thing in apartment gardening is knowing what your light exposure is, says Laurelynn Martin, co-owner of Logee's Plants for Home & Garden. "If you know the exposure of your windows, you can figure out what type of plants to grow," she says. "Southern exposure and full sun allows you to grow just about anything. If you have a north window, you want a full shade plant." Laurelynn recommends foliage plants, such as 'Pink Princess' philodendron, or a succulent, like Haworthia tessellata, for northern windows. If you want colorful flowers, grow Sinningias, such as 'Prudence Risley' Sinningia hybrid.

For an east or west window, she suggests growing a partial to full sun plant, depending on the time of year. "Begonias are an excellent choice because they adapt well to a home environment," she says. Her favorite is Begonia 'Autumn Ember,' which sizzles with orange leaves. Flowering maples, such as 'Sunrise Sunset' abutilon, bloom with a bright east or west window. For something unusual try Albuca 'Frizzle Sizzle' with its quirky, twisted stems and vanilla-scented flowers.

Can you grow plants if you don't have any windows? Laurelynn says yes—use grow lights.



## Temperature

Ambient apartment temperatures are fine for most houseplants. Place plants where they won't experience drafts—away from heating or cooling vents and exterior doors. In northern regions in winter, air near windows can be significantly colder, especially at night. Protect the most tropical plants by moving them away from windows after sundown.

## Humidity

Aim for a relative humidity of 50 percent or higher. In most apartments, humidity usually falls into the 30 to 40 percent range. The exception occurs in winter, when dry air drives humidity to 10 to 20 percent. A cool vapor humidifier is the best way to raise humidity around plants. A humidity tray works, too. As water evaporates from the tray, it raises the humidity around the plants on it. Just be sure plants aren't sitting directly in water—that can lead to root rot.

*photo opposite:  
inspiration*

Use various greens and browns throughout your house to compliment your garden.

## Plants

As you select plants for your apartment garden, consider ones that put on a show with little care. "Citrus are great plants because they can be kept relatively small, have fragrant flowers and bear fruit at a young age," Laurelynn says. "Meyer lemon makes a great first citrus."

She recommends dinner plate hibiscus if your style runs to big, bold colors. "Hibiscus are easy to grow and flower reliably. Begonias are also great apartment plants with colorful leaves and an ability to adapt to partial shade and low humidity," she says.

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### ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR



**Julie Martens Forney**  
Enthusiastic gardener with a passion for year-round color and practical advice which she shares from her own 25 plus years of gardening.

# Growing Vegetables in Containers

## The Pros and Cons

From The Complete Garden Guide

There are a handful of advantages and disadvantages to growing vegetables in containers. For gardeners with a limited amount of space, such as an apartment, growing vegetables in containers may be the only option. You can also get creative with the placement of containers, such as hanging baskets or indoors gardens near the windowsill.

*This article outlines some of the major pros and cons of starting a container based vegetable garden.*

### ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR



Joe Marandez From CCG  
Avid Gardener. Free thinker. Father, Husband, and Son.

Check out The Complete Garden Guide at [www.completestgardenguide.com](http://www.completestgardenguide.com)

*photo opposite:  
inspiration*

Create your own pots and containers for a unique look all your own.

### Benefits of Growing Vegetables in Containers

#### Containers require very little space.

You can start growing vegetables in containers with as little as 1 square foot for space. It's the ideal choice for people living in small urban spaces such as apartments, townhomes, and condos.

#### Containers are Movable.

Growing veggies in containers allows you to move your garden as needed. If your plants require more sunshine, you can easily adjust their placement to as the sun changes paths. You can easily protect your plants if adverse weather becomes a problem.

#### Fewer Weeds to Pull.

Containers require far less maintenance than a full vegetable garden. When your plants are isolated, they do not have the level of weed growth you have with a full blown garden.

#### Less Physical Effort Needed.

If you suffer from back problems or any other physical disability, growing in containers will limit the amount of tilling, weed pulling, and shoveling needed. This can be a huge benefit for gardeners with physical limitations.

#### Creative Options.

With containers, you can easily change the arrangements and design of your garden. You can experiment with different plants, arrangements, and even grow flowers among your veggies. Changing this in a traditional garden requires ten times the effort.

### Disadvantages of Growing Vegetables in Containers

#### Constant Water Required.

Containers do not retain water for long periods of time. Unlike a backyard garden, vegetable roots in containers cannot tap into water present in the soil. You can expect to water every single day, and sometimes twice per day in the spring and summer.

#### Containers can be Expensive.

If you plan on buying the aesthetically pleasing containers, expect to shell out a decent amount of cash. Most higher end containers will run you \$50 to \$200, depending on size.

#### Soil Needs to be Replenished.

The soil in containers need to be replenished every year. Fertilizing the existing soil is not sufficient to maintain optimum growing conditions in containers. This can be a tedious task, and may be a great deal of work with large containers.



# 8 FRUITS & VEGETABLES You Can Grow In a *Tiny Apartment.*

By Zoe Schaeffer

Want to grow your own food but don't have any land to speak of? Renting doesn't have to mean forgoing garden-to-table produce or that delightful feeling of soil between your fingers. Here are 10 fruits and veggies in pots that can sit pretty on a super small porch, fire escape, or even in a well lit indoor area.

And, unlike traditional gardens, you won't have to deal with many intrusive weeds either!



## Artichokes

Artichokes—especially Globe—can and will produce gorgeous, dense buds when planted in containers. They're heavy feeders and take up lots of space, so choose a large pot, fertilize amply, and provide plenty of water, especially when the buds begin to appear.

Plant seeds under grow lights 8 weeks before your region's last frost date, or, depending on your zone, you can plant them in a container set outdoors in the fall and allow them to overwinter. Sow seeds 1/4-inch deep, 1/4-inch apart, and under 1/4 inch of potting soil, then wait! Their growing season is long but worth the wait.

## Asparagus

Asparagus is famous for needing years sans harvest in order to thrive. For renters, that can be a huge barrier to planting, but grow in a container and suddenly you've got a portable perennial treat. Like rhubarb, asparagus doesn't grow as strong and plentiful in a container as in a garden bed, but if permanent planting isn't an option for you, there's hope.

want more?

The Trick to Growing Asparagus in Containers.

<https://www.rodalesorganiclife.com/garden/trick-growing-asparagus-containers>

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### ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR



Zoe Schaeffer

Writer, photographer, videographer. Editor for *Savoir* and *Rodale's Organic Life*.

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## Strawberries

Look for either a June-bearing or ever-bearing variety (Alpine strawberries are great for growing indoors), and then make sure you can house them somewhere that receives at least six hours of strong daylight. If you're growing them inside, you can plant at any time of year.

If you'll be housing them outdoors, plant in the early spring in areas with cold winters; plant in the fall if you don't. Start with transplants to avoid the complications of germinating seeds, and soak the roots, trimmed to 5 inches, in water for an hour before planting with the bud crowns level with the soil.

Strawberries have shallow roots, so the shape and size of your container matters little, but a hanging planter is a fun and unexpected option.

Remove blossoms for the first six weeks, and then fertilize your flowering plants every 10 days. Water daily during their growing season.

## Ginger

You thought it only grew in dense, tropical jungles—not exactly your suburban living room. But this spicy, versatile root is easily grown in containers. Ginger foliage also happens to be pretty, so you get an ornamental and a banging stir-fry seasoning all in one. You can start your container plant from a grocery store root as long as it's fresh (and organic). Ginger doesn't mind being crowded, so most containers will work, though wider planters are good for ginger's horizontal growth.

Break the root into pieces (ideally with an "eye," like the ones on potatoes, on each one), and plant them an inch or two below the surface. Plant with the eyes facing up. Use healthy, rich soil with good drainage—a 1-to-1 mix of compost and sandy soil is ideal.

Keep the soil consistently damp without allowing for too much runoff, which carries nutrients with it. Place your container in a warm spot next to an indirect light source. You can harvest after a few months, but the longer you wait, the better your results. Homegrown roots will be milder than most you find in the grocery store but no less delicious.

## Rhubarb

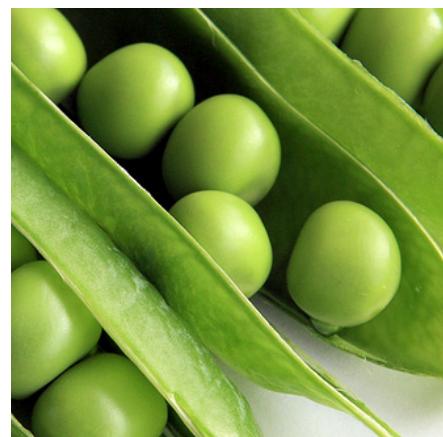
While rhubarb won't thrive in a container the same way as in a garden bed, it will produce, and that's good news for renters or homeowners lacking true backyard space.

Since rhubarb root systems run long, plant transplants in a pot with at least a 12-inch diameter and good depth.

Drainage is a must. Look up your particular plant variety to determine which season to start. Plant the rhubarb crowns 1 to 3 inches below the soil surface, and then plop your container in an area that receives at least six hours of daylight.

You may want to put it on a sunny porch or other outdoor space as long as your hardiness zone is 3 through 8. If and when the roots fill the container, likely after several years, you can divide and repot.

Avoid harvesting new or repotted plants for at least year, but after that, your homemade pies and crumbles will never be the same.



## Watermelon

Look for compact varieties with small fruits, like Sugar Babies, and plant a single seed in a large container, like a 5-gallon bucket, with ample drainage. Fertilize well, and plant when there's no longer any threat of frost. Protect your growing seed from any wind.

It's a good idea to set up a trellis behind the container to give your plant vertical room to grow.

Lastly, check the seed packet for your particular variety to find out just how long before you can harvest.

## Winter Squash

Squash means sprawling vines, enormous leaves, and huge, heavy fruits, right? Well, yes. But not bush squash, like Butterbush, which are easily and happily planted in containers. Wait until two weeks or so after your last frost date for the best results, and choose a pot at least 20 inches in diameter and depth. A 5-gallon bucket (or larger) will work as long as it has drainage. Again, transplants will fare better than direct-sowed seeds. Plant in nutrient-rich soil, though beware excess nitrogen.

Give your plants about an inch of water a week. Leave them on the plant for a few weeks after you think they're ready—it'll give them a fighting chance in storage.

## Peas

You can grow super sweet peas, both snap and shelling, in a container with little effort. And peas grow quickly, so you can enjoy the fruits of your small-space efforts in no time. Plant in the spring when temps climb above 60 degrees. Choose a large container with good drainage and fill it to a few inches below the rim with good potting soil.

Fertilize, but not too much—excess nitrogen will destroy the peas' productivity. Planting from seeds is fine; place them 1 to 2 inches apart, gently press them down, then add another inch of soil.

Keep the soil moist but not wet, and place your container in the shade until the seeds germinate, then move it to an area that receives full sun.

Lean your container against a surface that can support a trellis and help your peas climb as they grow. Snap peas are best harvested young; shelling peas are better when they're mature.

want more?

Ready to grow some really, really cool stuff? Joseph Simcox, aka *The Botanical Explorer*, searches the world over for super nutritious and unusually delicious rare plants.

Try your hand at cultivating Peruvian berries, Malaysian eggplants, or Italian melons by searching his seed growrareseeds.com catalog.

photo opposite:  
**inspiration**

Don't forget about flowers!  
They can bring a burst of color  
to your apartment garden.







Do it yourself.

# Apartment Gardening

DIY

# Alternative GARDENING IDEAS

By Rachael Liska



## Straw Barrel Gardening

This concept is so popular you can buy a whole book on it, *Straw Bale Gardens*, by Joel Karsten. Once you get the bales in place, they're easy to plant and care for. Straw acts as both mulch and compost, keeping plants warm and well fed. And because the bales keep garden plants off the ground, there's no more stooping!

### Step 1.

Get your hands on some straw bales. Any variety will do, but wheat is most likely to be free of weed seeds. Contact a garden center, home-supply store or a local farmer.

### Step 2.

Decide on your garden's location and move the bales to that spot. With the straw shafts running vertically, place them end to end to form rows, or arrange in a pattern. Squares, starbursts and spirals are fun options.

### Step 3.

Water and fertilize each bale thoroughly; you may have to do this a couple of times a week if it's especially dry or warm out. Then allow five to seven days for the bales to "cook." Once the bales are cool, pick off any weed shoots and spread a 2- to 3-inch layer of garden soil on top.

### Step 4.

Using a garden trowel, pull back a clump of straw to make a hole for planting. If planting veggies with deeper root systems, simply go down a bit farther and add additional soil. Plant most any variety of vegetable you wish—peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, mixed salad greens and herbs are all excellent candidates.

### Step 5.

Water plants regularly, or, if bales are side by side, run a soaker hose along the tops. Use a supplemental fertilizer every couple of weeks.

## Bag Gardening

So maybe, at first glance, alternative gardening ideas like, say, planting directly into a bag seems like the ultimate in laziness. But take a closer look and you'll be convinced that success doesn't always have to come hard.

An ideal option for green-thumb wannabes living in condos, mobile homes or urban jungles, bag gardens thrive almost anywhere. There's no worry about weeds, and no guesswork about amending soil.

Plus, it's even attractive now that you have gorgeous grow bag options like the ones pictured here from Gardener's Supply Company.

### Step 1.

Position your bag wherever you like—on a patio, alongside the house, on a balcony—in an area that gets at least six to eight hours of full sun a day (if you're growing vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers or peppers; leafy greens can tolerate a few hours less). It's important to position it first because it can get heavy to move later.

### Step 2.

Fill your bag with soil all the way to the top. You don't have to worry about drainage because these bags were designed to have good drainage built in.

### Step 3.

Sow seeds or young plants in bags, and water well. Like most gardens, bag varieties benefit from mulch, so pile on any chemical-free grass clippings, straw or leaves you have on hand.

*photo opposite:  
An example  
of bag gardening.*

## Herb Spirals

What's not to love? They're an efficient use of space, as good as the soil you fill them with, and can be made out of most any building material—stone, brick, bamboo stakes, cinder block, even PVC pipe. Plus they're pretty!

### Step 1.

Place a wooden stake at the center of your future garden and tie a 2- to 3-foot length of string to it. Secure a can of spray paint to the other end of the string and mark the circumference.

### Step 2.

Cover the staked-out circle with cardboard and wet thoroughly.

### Step 3.

Starting from any point on the outside circle, begin creating a perimeter with whatever material you've selected, stacking or measuring higher as you go along. At the halfway point, work your way in to make a spiral that ends near the center of the garden and measures about 3 feet high.

### Step 4.

Fill the spiral with garden soil and let settle for a couple of days.

### Step 5.

Plant with a variety of herbs. Heat-loving plants like oregano, sage and rosemary will thrive near the top. Chives, parsley and tarragon do well in the middle, and herbs needing more shade and moisture, such as mint and lemon balm, will be happy near the bottom.

*photo opposite:*

### inspiration

Found objects can really make an indoor garden pop.

## Cinder Block Garden Wall

No yard? No problem. Simply collect a couple of dozen cinder blocks and fashion a unique patio garden that's bursting with a bounty of good eats. These look cool placed against a wall, in a corner or as stand-alone sculptural pieces.

### Step 1.

Decide how many plants you'll include and then prepare the same number of blocks for planting by gluing wire mesh to the bottom of each. Then line the inside of each block opening with landscape fabric.

### Step 2.

Stack blocks to form a wall, creating any shape you wish. You can arrange blocks so that the plants grow either out of the tops or out of the sides.

### Step 3.

Fill lined blocks with potting mix and slip in plants with smaller root systems, like herbs, leafy greens and dwarf varieties of your favorite vegetables. Water regularly.

## extra tips!

### For the Straw Barrel Garden:

*Give your bales a makeover by surrounding them with a low white picket fence, or plant the corners with trailing nasturtiums and the sides with compact flowers like marigolds and sweet alyssum.*

### For Herb Spiral Garden:

*Herb spirals are a great way to make use of a small space. You just need a few feet. Then you build it up with stone, brick or other material and plant your favorite herbs.*





## **How to Grow Plants in Containers**

by the complete garden guide

# Choosing a Container Size

Choosing the right size container is an essential first step when planning your garden. You must make sure that the container size is sufficient to accommodate the type of plant you are growing. If your container is too small it could cause stunted growth and a failure to produce fruit. The root system must have plenty of space to absorb nutrients from the soil. Also, it is important to ensure the container will be able to drain properly. Too much water in the soil will inhibit the airflow needed to produce a bountiful vegetable garden.

## Small Containers

Small containers are defined as being no larger than 10 inches in diameter and 6 inches in height. Containers in this category can only accommodate plants with a small root system. Vegetables that fall into this category include spinach, green onions, radishes, and most leafy greens.

## Mid-Sized Containers

Midsized vegetable containers can be defined as being approx 15 inches wide and 12 inches deep. Containers of this size will accommodate most popular vegetable varieties, but it is still best to grow dwarf varieties whenever possible. Midsized containers will generally not support larger veggies like potatoes, corn, or cucumbers.

## Large Containers

Large containers are anything bigger than 15 inches wide and 12 inches deep. Large pots should be able to support any popular vegetables including tomatoes, dwarf corn, tomatoes, cabbage, bell peppers, etc. Buying large

pots can be expensive. You can expect to pay up to \$200 per pot from high quality suppliers. We encourage gardeners to look around for creative or recycled container options.

## Choosing Container Soil

Soil is without question the most important aspect of container gardening for one to consider. To support a successful garden, your soil will need to supply ample primary nutrients, while also allowing for proper drainage. We recommend purchasing a premade container soil mixture from your local plant nursery, rather than trying to mix the soil yourself. These store bought soils will have the necessary primary and secondary nutrients your plants need, which allow for proper drainage and air flow.

## Making your Own Container Soil

Container soil must be lighter than the soil you want for a traditional backyard garden. If the soil in a container becomes too compacted, it will restrict airflow and your plants might become waterlogged. If you are a DIY kind of person, we have listed a basic organic formula for making your own soil for your container garden.

*Mix the Ingredients Below* together in a Wheelbarrow. Apply water to the soil and allow it to sit for several hours. It should be fairly moist before being placed in the containers.

1 Cubit Foot of *Peat Moss*  
1 Cubic Foot of *Vermiculite*  
8 Ounces of *Bone Meal Powder*  
8 Ounces of *Lime*  
1 Ounce of *Alfalfa Meal*  
*Watering Container Plants*

Plants in containers require

frequent watering. The vegetable roots have less water to tap from deep in the soil. In general, you will need to water your containers at least once per day. In some hotter areas, it may be necessary to water the plants twice per day. The top of the soil should be fairly moist a few minutes after watering. If the top appears dry again after 5 minutes, you should apply more water. You might also try applying mulch to the top of the soil to slow down the evaporation rate. Leaves or grass clipping from your yard are a great choice for this. Make sure the water is draining out of the bottom to ensure you are not overwatering the plants.

## Fertilizing Container Plants

The amount of nutrients in container soil is very limited. It is best to apply fertilizer to the soil about halfway through the growing season. This will ensure that your plants are not running out of macronutrients when they need them the most.

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### ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR



Melinda Pratt from CCG  
Writer and Editor for many gardening magazines and blogs.

Check out The Complete Garden Guide at [www.completegardenguide.com](http://www.completegardenguide.com)

# Small Garden Ideas

## May 2017 Collection

By Doug Jimerson

Tips featured in:  
**Better Homes  
& Gardens.**

### Create an Outdoor Room

Turn a tiny patio into a gorgeous outdoor room by adding a freestanding pergola. Here, a small wooden pergola was constructed over a gravel patio and enhanced with a teak seating arrangement. The pergola creates a sense of enclosure and makes the patio seem a lot larger than it actually is.



### Go Gravel

Crushed brick or gravel is a beautiful and low-maintenance paving option for small gardens. It's also easier to use and less expensive than brick or flagstone. Just be sure to spread a layer of landscape fabric underneath the gravel to keep weeds from popping through. On this California hillside, the gravel also allows rainfall to percolate through to the soil instead of running off down the hillside.



### Add a Mowing Strip

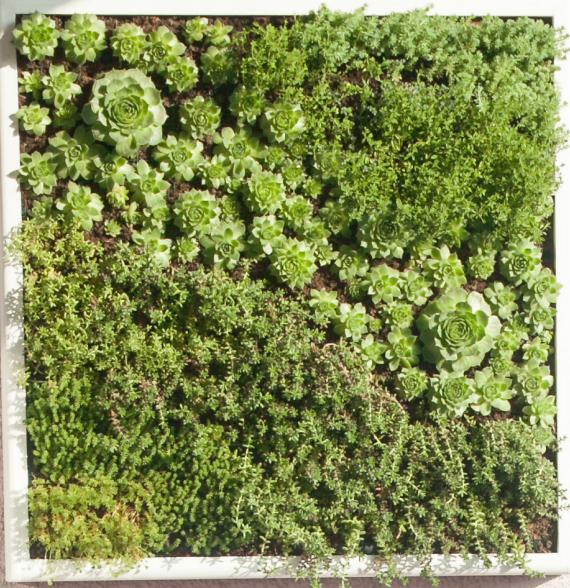
Keeping turf grass from encroaching in your garden beds is a lot easier when you install a mowing strip at the border's edge. This mowing strip was specially designed to keep weeds at bay and act as a low-maintenance garden path. It also provides easy, mud-free access to the garden for wheelbarrows, mowers, and other equipment.



### Double Your Pleasure

Get twice the flowers and vegetables in your small garden by adding a trellis or low fence behind every planting bed. That way, you can grow vine crops vertically so they don't sprawl over their plant neighbors. In this narrow garden bed, a trio of rustic wooden trellises support flowering vines at the back of the perennial border.







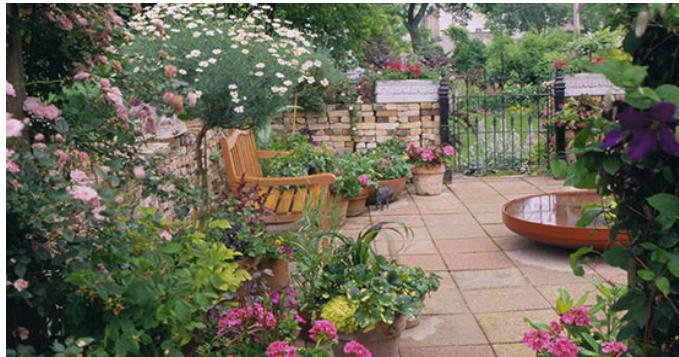
# Small Garden Ideas

Tips featured in:

**Better Homes  
& Gardens**

## Rely on Pots

Enjoy your own corner of paradise by packing your small garden with pots and planters overflowing with flowers and fragrant herbs. In this luxurious backyard, pots of geranium (scented and standard) and marguerite daisy provide the bulk of color surrounding a welcoming teak bench. A large terra-cotta bowl acts as a reflecting pool and birdbath.



## Add Drama

Give small gardens a big boost of style by adding an oversize gate or arbor at one end to act as a focal point. It will draw the eye in and make the space seem larger. Here, a large-scale ornamental entry arbor gives this tiny side yard some visual heft. Plus, it supports a crown of climbing roses. White lilies in the center bed mirror the white roses and arbor.



## Welcome Wildlife

Even a small garden can become a haven for birds and butterflies when you choose flowers they prefer. For example, this square bed is packed with bird and butterfly favorites, such as black-eyed Susan and phlox. A bird feeder and birdhouse add to the garden's wildlife-friendly features.



## Color Your World

Shady backyards are a great place to spend a hot summer afternoon, but too often, they can be a bit dark and dull. Brighten the view with colorful pillows, fabrics, outdoor rugs, and pots in a variety of colors and patterns. This shady deck is now a colorful spot for family fun.



