



Gardens for All

With innovations from Oklahoma entrepreneurs, container gardeners have new options for growing success.
By Sara Cowan

Gardeners can grow a variety of food crops in Smart Pots, including tomatoes, herbs, and lettuce.

REDUCED MOBILITY, HEALTH issues, or simply the absence of suitable land for planting once forced garden enthusiasts to put aside their passion, but a few low-tech solutions might offer new opportunities.

Tabletop gardens often are a compromise, but traditional clay or plastic containers inhibit the development of a healthy root system that naturally occurs underground. When roots hit the wall of these solid pots, they begin to form long, winding spirals and circle the bottom of the pot, which is not ideal for healthy plant growth. But two Oklahoma City-based companies have created solutions perfect for self-contained gardens.

The manufacturer of **Smart Pot** has developed a proprietary felt material that encourages “air pruning,” wherein root systems send out new branches every time they penetrate the porous wall. These new root branches are more effective in getting nutrients and water to the plants. The soft,

lightweight pots are ideal for a tabletop garden, says Tim Ferchau, eastern regional sales manager at Smart Pot.

“A key benefit is the ease of set-up,” he says. “You just unfold and fill them with soil, and you are ready to plant.”

Consistent watering is vital to growing success but not always possible—especially during an oppressive Oklahoma heat wave. Larry Pierce of Newalla invented the **Garden Anywhere Box’s** automatic watering system, and his wife Letitia says it is what makes the product unique. She asked him to come up with a solution to help her keep up with watering their container garden when he used to travel for work. He tinkered on the weekends until he found the answer.

Large plastic storage totes are specially outfitted to be connected together via tubing, and then the group of boxes is linked to a water source like a rain barrel or a garden hose. Letitia says it’s okay to go away on vacation and not worry about

the garden, because the system uses gravity to provide just the right amount of water. One eighteen-gallon box could grow two large tomato plants and an assortment of herbs, she says. Furthermore, because the boxes are portable, gardeners can start seeds indoors and move the tubs outdoors after the first frost.

Although these gardens may not offer the fully immersive experience of a yard full of plants, their manageable size and comfortable height might make them less intimidating to many would-be gardeners. Thanks to some forward-thinking Oklahomans, many green thumbs now can come out of hiding.



Smart Pot containers are sold in many garden supply stores around the state. smartpots.com. Garden Anywhere Box has a booth at the OSU-OKC Farmers Market every Saturday. (405) 818-2599 or gardenanywherebox.com.