

GROW YOUR OWN

By JENNIFER CEASER

You can forgo flowers for produce in even the smallest city space

SPRING is here and the time is ripe to get your garden growing. But don't start buying up flats of flowering plants just yet — first, figure out what will work in your space.

Kate Payne, author of the new book "The Hip Girl's Guide to Homemaking," learned that when she lived on the ground floor of a Brooklyn brownstone. "I didn't get good light — even the windowsills were sunless," she says. And though there was a shared garden, that too got no sun.

After much trial and error, Payne discovered indoor plants wouldn't thrive in her dark apartment, so she began growing everything outside. "All of my garden space was in containers and I basically chased the sun around," she says. "I bought a large bucket, put it on the stoop of the building and grew beets, carrots and cucumbers. And I



Just tack the Wally Pocket pouch to a wall and fill with soil. Add a cascading strawberry plant for homegrown fruit, \$39. At Design Within Reach, dwr.com.

grew strawberries; they were in a pot that I hung on the back deck. Strawberries are fun to grow — you'll get a few cute little berries plus they have pretty flowers.

And the season for berries is May and June."

Other easy-growing plants Payne swears by are jalapenos (they should get about five hours of sun) and lettuce, which needs only partial sun. "Lettuce is really easy to grow in a window box; it's a really pretty green color, it tastes really fresh, and you can dot it with flowers or intersperse it with herbs."

What to avoid? Surprisingly, tomatoes.

"Tomatoes are a bit finicky," says Payne. "A common mistake is to crowd them in a container. They need to be planted in a deeper container — like a 5-gallon bucket. Then you have to fertilize them, add nutrients; there are so many factors. Then you might get like four tomatoes. It's better to focus your energies elsewhere."

That sentiment is echoed by



Five succulent plants come with the Giselle Succulent Trough, which can be placed on your windowsill or patio, \$74. At oliveandcocoa.com.

Groundworks, Inc. co-owners Alice Marcus Krieg and Carmen DeVito, who suggest trying your hand at herbs if you don't have the greenest of thumbs.

"They're the easiest things to grow, and they require a very low investment," says DeVito, though she does caution against certain herbs. "Avoid dill, fennel; these are giant plants. The best are the annuals [those that live for only one season] like basil, thyme and oregano. When they start flowering, that's when they should be thrown out."

But what if you'd prefer something a little more permanent?

"Terrariums are a way to grow unusual plants indoors — passion vines, lemons, violets — they are like little pieces of art," says Marcus Krieg. "A terrarium is a controlled environment in terms of humidity; the plants make their own moisture, so they require little watering."

You can make your own using a glass hurricane lamp turned upside down, or if you'd like a head start, buy a ready-made terrarium at twigterrariums.com.