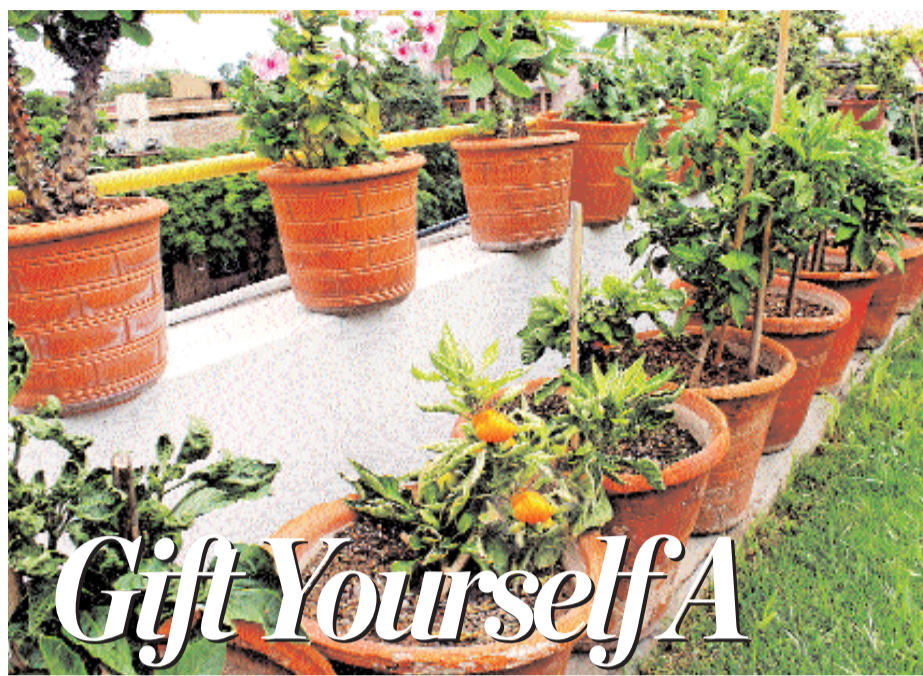


UNLOCK POSITIVITY

From a pot of herbs on the windowsill, tucking salads and vegetables in among the flowers beds, to setting aside a dedicated plot, there are many ways to create your harvest in a veggie patch



Gift Yourself A

Kitchen Garden

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With the increase in population and urbanisation, everything that is organic is getting pricey day by day. However, there are ways to cut your expenses while grocery shopping by having your own kitchen garden. Apart from the advantage of cutting your food bills, there is nothing tastier or healthier than using fresh ingredients for the kitchen table, straight from your own garden.

LOOK FOR THE RIGHT SPACE

Instead of choosing a shady location for your kitchen garden, opt for a sunny spot. Lighting requirements may vary according to plants and seasons. However, most kitchen garden plants require at least 3-6 hours of sunlight on a daily basis. Warm temperature and good air circulation are also important.

"If you can't find any other space, assess your windows to see if you can place pots or planters on them in which you can grow greens, herbs and other plants that don't become too tall and block the natural light. Vertical gardens are becoming a popular solution for tiny apartments as all you need is a wall and some sunlight to grow vegetables," says Akansha Nair, who loves gardening.

GET CONTAINERS

Now, this is very important. After you have selected the location for your kitchen garden, the next step is to get the containers for your plants. While earthen pots are the cheapest and the most easily available kind of container for plants in the market, do not shy away from reusing plastic bottles or jars or even glass containers for your kitchen garden plants and herbs. Also, the container must be at least 6 inches or taller to accommodate

fast-growing roots and have drainage holes so that the roots do not develop mould due to water clogging.

WATCH THEM GROW

Once you sow the seeds and saplings, make sure that you watch them daily and take care of their needs. Take care not to overwater. "Check under the leaves of plants to spot any insect attack as soon as it starts, so that you can take control measures to nip it in the bud. Look out for drooping or yellowing leaves as these usually point to the plant not getting the right amount of water or nutrients. Remember to ask a friend or neighbour to take care of your plants while you are travelling, so that they continue to thrive in your absence," says Sandeep Kaur, a home-maker from the city.

LIST OF PLANTS

After considering the amount of sunlight in the area and containers for the plants, make a list of vegetables, greens and herbs that you would like to grow. Methi (fenugreek) and local varieties of spinach are the best options to start with. Tomato, cucumber and bitter melon are ideal vegetables for beginners. Herbs such as mint and coriander, which are used daily in Indian cooking, are also excellent choices.

THE RIGHT POTTING MIX

You can buy ready-made potting soil from the neighbourhood nursery. These usually contain a mix of soil, coco-peat and compost. It is convenient as all you need to do is fill your pots with the soil mix. Alternatively, if you know an avid



Crazy Or Chic? Take Your Pick

Ever wondered what it must be like for a divorced woman at 30 to try dating? Debolina Dubois-Bandyopadhyay is sure to have you in splits with her humorous accounts

Let's just get this fact written and memorised, dating as a 30 (ahem!)-year-old divorced Desi-Swiss woman is nothing less than living a telenovela. Depending on cultural upbringing, geneses to this issue of divorce and consequent dating may vary. It is safe to say that divorced women are either expected to live a life of singlehood and shame, or be insta-demonised as "crazy", "bossy", or even - "man eater" and "cougar" (depending on the affinity of her dating rhythm)! Let me emphasise — dating is a nightmare.

After a year of my divorce, alongside compulsive eating, chopping my hair to what I thought would make me look "très chic", and hanging out with all my girls - I finally got the courage to put myself out there. Easy solution: paste face on generic-dating apps such as Badoo, Tinder, and (recently) Bumble. But wait. You have to pay for every swipe undone, privilege to message freely, checking who liked your profile, etc.

Believe me, these apps are a way of testing your patience, checking your wallet, and of course... questioning your existence! "Occasionally one does match with some idiot for a date. But these same men didn't bother reading your "bio". You know? That important part of your dating profile where you have specifically mentioned that you are recently getting out of a long-term serious commitment (to sugar coat the social stigma of "divorced") and therefore want to test the waters before diving into anything remotely serious? Yes. That.

I had the pleasure of meeting some of those baffling creatures. One randomly whispered "sweet nothings" into my ear. "Cause he Googled it (100 for effort, 0 for execution). This led to his date (aka yours truly) to be MIA, with an apology Whatsapp. "Sorry, I had to leave. My dog ate my seminar paper"! On another lovely instance where I finally got to a decent level of conversation with a rando



during lockdown, and finally decided to meet him within the window of opportunity presented by social distancing and compulsory mask wearing. I got to first-hand experience the lovely technique of "negging" aka "negative feedback". My date decided to play with my confidence to get me to beg for his approval. Sort of emotional manipulation to get women to fall in love (seriously, read up, this toxic tactic does get certain women to fall in love!)

It's a vicious game, dating. You are being constantly judged, self-image is split and smashed off its hinges, your walls are tinted with hurtful comments from strangers believing that they have a right to judgment, there's a crack in your spirit dented in the shape of fists, phones, and flower vases - cause you are dodging maleficence in the most phenomenal way. Dating is hard enough, but dating as a divorced woman is a one-way ticket to irreversible dark humour, cynicism, and a hard-core resume of life-experiences. I wanted to turn my divorce into positive new beginnings. I mean... Who doesn't? Yet, you never really know how strong a woman is until she is divorced, dating, and thriving at thirty (ahem!)-years.

The writer is a writer, poet, designer and visual artist. Share your views at Aaheli.Ghose@timesgroup.com

gardener or an expert, you can consult them to create your own mix by sourcing soil and blending it with cocopeat and organic fertiliser. The advantage with the latter approach is that you can customise the soil

depending on the plant, as some varieties need more drainage and others more compost. When you buy compost, remember to get an extra packet, so that you can sprinkle some over the top layer of soil once

CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE

a month to give your plants a boost of nutrients.

Do not forget to show them some love. Believe it or not, it is not impossible to grow your own vegetable garden with yields of this nature.

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