Irvine Ranch Water District

the dirt

WINTER 2026 GARDENING NEWSLETTER

Sky's the limit for your outdoor spaces.

Take your yard to new heights with vertical gardening.

Good landscape design is all about perspective, and this winter, things are looking up—literally.

If you've been discouraged by your yard's pint-sized footprint, consider vertical gardening, a practical way to personalize even the smallest space. Vertical gardening grows plants upwards on walls or trellises, bringing new dimension to your outdoor space and allowing those with less room on the ground to still spruce up their yards.

Create a statement piece at the entrance of your yard with an arbor, which can be customized to fit any space. Use hooks, twine or wires to add roses, wisteria or ivy for a pop of color.

Tomatoes are a great choice for novice gardeners. Start with dwarf varieties ideal for containers; add stakes or cages, tuck the pot away in a corner and watch them thrive. Cherry and grape tomatoes do well in hanging baskets, which can be hung from freestanding hooks or overhangs.

Vertical gardening is a practical way to personalize even the smallest yards with easy-to-maintain plants.

For experienced green thumbs, plant herbs, succulents or winter blooms like jasmine in a stacked or tiered planter. Lean it against a wall or the side of your house to maximize space.

With vertical gardening, one simple plant is an easy first step to creating the yard of your dreams—no matter its size.

Gathering glow.

Bring the warmth outdoors with a fire pit for get-togethers.

Edgar Godinez | Owner, Urban Customs Landscape
Edgar Godinez got his start 21 years ago at his father's landscape company and grew his skill and career in a big way—with his own successful design-build firm, which earned this year's President's Award from the local California Landscape Contractors Association for a renovation project that uses a fire pit as a focal point.

What makes fire pits so alluring?

Godinez: Fire pits elevate outdoor spaces by creating a warm gathering area for family and friends. They add a welcoming atmosphere that expands your living space outdoors and significantly enhances the overall look and feel of your home.

What's better, gas or propane?

Godinez: Gas-line fire pits offer the benefit of never running out of fuel during gatherings, and they can be fully customized to match your outdoor design. However, they do come with higher costs due to gas line installation, proper construction for heat resistance and the possibility of requiring permits or HOA approval.

Propane tank pits can be installed quickly—often in a day—and cost significantly less than a custom-built gas-line fire pit. They provide convenience and immediate use. On the downside, they cannot be customized as extensively and do not deliver the same tailored aesthetic. Additionally, you must regularly replace propane tanks.

What key takeaways would you like to share?

Godinez: When planning for a fire pit, be sure it complements the style of your home and is located in a safe and accessible area. Remember to size it comfortably to accommodate the group you will be entertaining. Most of all, have fun. Enjoy the process and let your creativity guide you. A fire pit is one of those features you simply can't go wrong with.

Follow Urban Customs Landscape on Instagram: @urban_customs_landscape

Ceanothus (California lilac)

A citrus twist on container gardening.

Sprucing up your small space is easy with citrus trees.

Growing citrus trees in containers is an excellent way to enjoy fresh fruit in small spaces. Pot size determines tree growth, so choose a container that matches your desired size and ensure it has drainage holes.

Semi-dwarf varieties like Meyer lemons adapt well to pots and remain manageable. Light pruning maintains shape and airflow. Monitoring for pests ensures vigor.

With consistent care, blossoms will turn into fruit, making container citrus a rewarding option for patios, balconies or urban gardens.

This method combines beauty, fragrance and productivity, proving that even limited spaces can yield abundant harvests.

Easy peasy, lemon-squeezy.

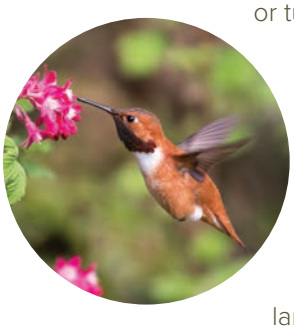
Follow these easy tips for growing citrus in container gardens this winter.

- Use nutrient-rich organic potting mix.
- Add lava rocks at the bottom or mixed in to improve aeration and keep roots healthy.
- Place the tree in full sun for 6–8 hours daily.
- Water deeply but let the topsoil dry slightly between waterings.
- Fertilize regularly with a balanced citrus blend.

Juan's tip of the season.

Add color to your winter landscape.

Winter has a bad rap for being drab. But you can have a vibrant, colorful landscape throughout the season. Many manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos sp.*) bloom in winter and early spring. Other native plants that bloom this time of year include gooseberries (*Ribes sp.*), lemonade berry (*Rhus integrifolia*) and Baja birdbush (*Ornithostaphylos oppositifolia*). Hummingbirds depend on these blooms in winter.



The Christmas berry *(Heteromeles arbutifolia*) is another beautiful evergreen shrub, providing a bounty of red berries that many species depend on during the colder months.

Looking ahead.

Your garden to-do list.

- **Watch your watering:** Reduce your watering schedule or turn off your sprinkler controller if it's raining. Follow our schedule at *IRWD.com/wateringguide*.
- **Smart pruning:** Prune trees and shrubs when plants are dormant. Use a mix of water and bleach to clean your tools to prevent transferring disease.
- **Fertilize:** Closer to spring, start fertilizing your landscape following the NPK formula: nitrogen for green growth, phosphorus for flowers and roots, and potassium for overall health. Try to use organic fertilizers, especially if you have fruit trees.

Resolve to fix your sprinklers in 2026

Kick off the New Year with half off qualified professional irrigation repairs using IRWD's Sprinkler Repair Program.

How? Apply for the program and, if approved, we'll cover 50% of your repair expenses. For details and to sign up, go to *IRWD.com/sprinklerrepair*.

If you prefer to do the repairs on your own, consider attending our Fix A Leak Workshop on March 7. Go to *IRWD.com/events* for information.

Tap our online resources.

Get inspiration for your yard at *yardtopia.com*. Once you have your plan in place, go to *IRWD.com/rebates* for rebates to help offset the cost of turf removal, weather-based irrigation controllers, efficient sprinkler heads, drip kits and more.

Need to contact IRWD?

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