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How to make your own topsy turvy tomato planter

Close Consumer Reports News: May 10, 2011 02:12 PM Recent recalls of tomatoes in California and Florida reminded us of how good it is to grow your own. We just got the results of our tomato grow-off in which we pitted the Topsy Turvy Upside Down Tomato planter against tomatoes raised in regular patio boxes. The process was a little messy but the results were delicious. During the growing season, we planted 24 tomato plants—half in regular patio boxes and half in Topsy Turvy planters, which you’ve probably seen advertised on TV. If not, as the image shows, the \$10 planters are plastic bags with a hole in the bottom and wire loops at the top. You put the plant in upside down with the stem poking through the hole, fill the bag with dirt and hang it. All our plants yielded about the same quality and quantity of tomatoes, but the Topsy Turvy had its drawbacks. For starters, it’s messy. Overwatering won’t drown the roots but dirty water will drip from the bag. That left stains below our planters. Two of our 12 Topsy Turvy plants broke off in windstorms because they can’t be staked. And the soil dried out too easily because the plant doesn’t shade the dirt. So although the Topsy Turvy planter produced fine tomatoes and might be fine for someone who wants to grow them on a porch or deck, pots or boxes are a better choice. In the past, we’ve found that the Earthbox, \$30, and the Self-Watering Patio Planter, \$40, worked well. FREE e-mail Newsletters! Choose from cars, safety, health, and more! Build & Buy Car Buying Service Save thousands off MSRP with upfront dealer pricing information and a transparent car buying experience. See your savings Get Ratings on the go and compare while you shop Learn more I am totally amazed by the idea of this Topsy Turvy Tomato Planter, you can buy it directly from Amazon. It’s basically a hanging planter with a hole at the bottom, so the tomatoes grow upside down, eliminating the need for stakes and weeding. I think it’s pretty groovy, yet cool enough for the small space and space saving gardening. If your looking for an unusual way to grow your tomatoes then look no further. Image how fun it will be by standing and picking the fresh and clean tomatoes while harvest. Here is an instruction for this cool little family craft project where you can make your own version. Will you grow your tomatoes upside down this year!?Here is a video from eHow on how to make this upside down tomato planter using bucket.You May love to grow strawberries off the ground, too. By: Heather Rhoades Growing tomatoes upside down, whether in buckets or in special bags, is not new but it has become wildly popular over the past few years. Upside down tomatoes save space and are more accessible. Let’s look at the ins and outs of how to grow upside down tomatoes. How to Grow Tomatoes Upside Down When planting tomatoes upside down, you will need either a large bucket, such as a 5-gallon (19 L.) bucket, or a specialty planter that is easy to find at your local hardware or department store. If you are using a bucket for growing tomatoes upside down, cut a hole about 3-4 inches (7.5-10 cm.) in diameter in the bottom of the bucket. Next, select the plants that will become your upside down tomatoes. The tomato plants should be sturdy and healthy. Tomato plants that produce smaller sized tomatoes, such as cherry tomatoes or roma tomatoes, will perform better in the upside down planter, but you can experiment with larger sizes as well. Push the root ball of the tomato plant through the hole in the bottom of the upside down container. After the root ball is through, fill the upside down planter with damp potting soil. Do not use dirt from your yard or garden, as this will be too heavy for the roots of the upside down tomato plant to grow in. Also, make sure that the potting soil is wetted down before you put it in the upside down planter. If it is not, you may have a hard time getting water all the way through the potting soil to the plants roots in the future as very dry potting soil will actually repel water. Hang your upside down tomatoes in a spot where they will get six or more hours of sun a day. Water your upside down tomato plants at least once a day, and twice a day if temperatures go above 85 F. (29 C.). If you would like, you can also grow other plants in the top of the upside down container. And that’s all there is to how to grow upside down tomatoes. The tomato plant will hang down and you will soon enjoy delicious tomatoes grown right outside your window. I love the space saving concept of the “Topsy Turvy” tomato planter. I think this planter concept is helpful in cutting down on weeding and a perfect solution for people who want to enjoy homegrown tomatoes but don’t have a yard. I’ll wager that if you had a window with enough sun exposure you could even grow tomatoes inside your home. I’ve looked at them in stores each season but just didn’t feel justified in spending the money to purchase one. I saw on a website a way to make your own using an emptied 2 liter soda bottle and a few simple items usually found around the house. (I’d love to give credit but it’s been over a year since I found the idea and I can’t remember the name of the site). This project was really simple and only took about 15 minutes to complete. This time includes several interruptions from my 2 year old daughter. To make your own “Topsy Turvy” tomato planter, you will need the following items ~ Empty, clean 2 liter plastic soda bottle A chopstick, wooden skewer or small dowel rod, at least 8 inches long. (You could also use a metal clothing hanger as I did on my first planter. However, it was very difficult for me to untwist the hanger and to twist it back into position). scissors potting soil coffee filter tomato plant wire or string to hang your planter with something to punch holes with (I used a screw but I think any sharp object would work. *If you like this article, be sure to subscribe to receive all the future helpful tips. It’s easy, free and we never sell or give away your information! 1) Wash an empty 2 liter soda bottle Remove label if desired. 2) Carefully cut bottom off approximately 2 inches. On the bottle I used, there was a ridge at the right spot which served as a guide. 3) Place the cut bottom portion inside the bottle in an inverted position. It should fit snugly. 4) With the bottom still inside the bottle, poke 2 holes through the sides to fit the chopstick or dowel rod. You will want to make sure to align these holes in a centered position so your planter isn’t off balance when hanging. 5) Pull the bottom out and make holes which will serve as a water dispenser for your plant. 6) This is what my water dispenser looks like. I made ten holes and attempted to evenly space them. 7) Choose a tomato seedling that isn’t very large yet. You’ll need to be able to thread the plant through the top off your bottle. 8) Tear a seam in the coffee filter from an edge to the center. Wrap gently around the base of your plant, covering the dirt. 9) Gently work the tomato plant through the neck of the bottle. Use your chopstick to help lift the plant through the opening if need be. 10) Turn your planter upside down and fill with potting soil. You will want to be sure to leave space to place the water dispenser/lid. 11) Thread the dowel rod/chopstick through the holes. 12) Secure wire to hang the plant. 13) Pour water into the dispenser until water drips out of the neck of the bottle. All of the materials for this project are widely available. You can buy a 5-gallon bucket at a home center, or you can ask for a free bucket at a local bakery or restaurant. You can find oilcloth at fabric or craft stores, or you can opt for a plastic tablecloth from a discount store. Potting soil and fertilizer are available at home improvement centers or garden stores, as are the tomato plants. Kerry Michaels Use a utility knife to carefully cut a hole in the bucket that is about 2 inches in diameter. It doesn’t have to be neat or exact. Some buckets may have a molded circle on the bottom that you can use as a guide for cutting. As an option, you can also cut or drill four small holes in the bottom of the bucket for extra drainage, and/or add some small holes in the bucket lid to increase air circulation. Kerry Michaels Measure the height of the bucket for the decorative covering, if you are adding one (it’s purely optional). Measure straight down from the lip near the top of the bucket to the bottom edge of the bucket. Also, measure the circumference of the bucket by wrapping the tape measure around the outside. Kerry Michaels Cut oilcloth or tablecloth material to fit the bucket, allowing for at least 2 inches of overlap in width. Depending on the type of fabric you are using, you may have to fold down the edges to get a clean look and prevent fraying, but with oilcloth, you can leave the edge raw. Tape the short edge of the fabric to the side of the bucket with a full-length strip of double-sided waterproof tape. Wrap the fabric tightly around the bucket and secure it at the seam with another strip of tape applied on the underside of the overlapping fabric so the tape is hidden. Kerry Michaels Adorn the edges of the oilcloth with plastic ribbon, twine, or raffia, if desired. This adds a decorative touch and helps secure the cloth along the edges. For added durability, secure the ribbon with small pieces of double-sided tape along its length. Kerry Michaels Cut a piece of fiberglass window screening to fit the bottom of the bucket on the inside. The screen helps to keep the plant and soil in the bucket while letting water drain out. Cut the center of the screen like a pie, so there are six small flaps, making the opening at least as big as the bucket’s drainage hole. It helps to fold the screen in half to make the first cut. Place the screen into the bottom of the bucket so it lies flat. Kerry Michaels To get your tomato seedling ready for planting, remove it from its pot or cell. If the plant is root-bound, separate the roots or lightly slice them with a knife. Take off any excess soil and remove the bottom few leaves. Moisten the root ball and then squeeze it firmly, which will help it slide into the bottom of your tomato bucket. Kerry Michaels Fill the bucket with potting soil. If the soil doesn’t already have fertilizer mixed in, add some now, as directed. The amount of soil you need depends on how you want to start the new plant. There are two approaches for planting an upside-down tomato: planting it right-side-up and letting it grow for a while before hanging it up; or planting it upside-down from the start. Some people like to plant the tomato right-side-up to start with and let it grow until the plant reaches around 12 inches tall. The advantage of this is that the container won’t shade the tomato plant when the sun is overhead. Also, upside-down tomatoes try to grow upward even if they are upside down; when you start it right-side-up, the plant won’t contort so quickly. Right-side-up method: Fill the bucket to the top with potting soil. Put the lid on securely and turn the bucket over (so the hole is on top). Push your tomato plant down into the soil through the hole in the bucket, up to the first set of sturdy leaves. Upside-down method: Fill the bucket with potting soil up to 3 to 5 inches from the top. Put the lid onto the bucket, then tip the bucket onto its side. Stuff the tomato seedling deeply into the hole in the bucket, up to its first set of sturdy leaves. Pull down the flaps of screening so they lie flat on the soil. Kerry Michaels Hang your tomato securely from its handle (if you’re starting it upside down). Remove the cover on the bucket so that the soil can receive rainfall or irrigation water. Immediately water the bucket until water begins to drain though the bottom hole. Care for your plant with a few expert tips: Keep soil moist, not soggy. One of the fastest ways to kill a tomato plant is not to give it enough water, but too much moisture is equally damaging. The soil should be consistently damp but not wet. A common problem known as blossom end rot occurs because of uneven calcium absorption, which is caused by fluctuating soil moisture levels. Leave the bucket lid partially on, if desired, to prevent the bucket from getting too heavy in a sudden downpour, while still allowing for air circulation. Feed your tomatoes every week with a diluted liquid fertilizer, such as fish emulsion. Because containers must be watered frequently, nutrients are depleted quickly. Avoid fertilizers high in nitrogen, which can encourage blossom end rot. A balanced fertilizer works best. Kerry Michaels

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