



Summer is Chicago's season of fun, with festivities lurking in every corner of the city. But you don't have to look farther than your own backyard to discover a world of splendor and inspiration.

Just ask Guillermo Castellanos, a veteran landscape architect originally from Honduras who has crafted gardens of paradise for more than a decade.

"It is fun to renew lifeless spaces, and to transform them into warm and inviting retreats that are void of tension and in tune with nature," he says.

Castellanos' Mito Landscape Design company is responsible for botanical creations in dozens of residential gardens in the Chicago area. One of them is an 800-square-foot urban oasis nestled in the heart of Chicago's Wrigleyville neighborhood, designed just steps from Adam Falk's bedroom.

"It's like having another living room and dining room," Falk says. "I love the urban envi-

ronment. All of the textures, sounds and smells. Well, not all of the sounds and smells, [but] it's wonderful to just waste a morning away on the deck reading the paper."

When Falk invested in his condominium, he asked the builder to reinforce the garage so he could eventually build a roof deck. It was a smart move that ended up adding 500 square feet to his outdoor space. It took him a while to get it off the ground, but when Falk decided to start his garden last year, he knew he would need help.

"Believe it or not, mature trees are very expensive. I wanted an expert involved so that I wouldn't buy and plant things that had no chance of surviving," says Falk.

So he called Castellanos, who carefully





LEFT: Guillermo Castellanos and Adam Falk (back to camera) enjoy a glass of wine on Falk's roof deck built on top of his condo garage. ABOVE FROM LEFT: Limelight hydrangeas bloom in cones of white; stones steps lead visitors from the garage to the roof deck; Guillermo Castellanos carefully selected the plants for Falk's outdoor space; even Falk's garden hose, kept inside this pot, melds into the landscape.

selected a variety of plants to give Falk the architectural ethos he desired. A lavish masterpiece emerged: Crabapples send up sparks of magenta on the rooftop garden. Limelight hydrangeas bloom in cones of white. Rozanne and Jolly Bee geranium varieties mimic the amethyst of a summer sunset when the garden is at its peak.

The space also features a special request from the client: "My parents planted a Japanese maple [tree] when I was born, and I have always wanted one on my property," Falk says.

It's the kind of addition that invokes a familial spirit so important when converting any area into a genuine living space. "There is great satisfaction that comes from the transformation of a space," Castellanos notes. "But [it's] even greater satisfaction to know that the use of this space will help to improve someone's quality of life."

The good news: you can do it, too — even if you don't have much space to spare. Raised garden beds are ideal for urban environments without natural ground soil. They can be built relatively easily and in a custom shape to fit your space. Raised beds provide adequate drainage for plants and help keep out garden pests, but it takes an investment between \$100 and \$300 on average to get started.

If you can't build beds, Castellanos

recommends using portable pots and hanging plants, which can be decorative as well as practical.

During the summer, plants will provide birds with food and refuge outside. When it gets colder, you can bring them indoors where they'll continue to liven up your home, he says.

Castellanos says plants such as redbuds, crabapples, serviceberries, magnolias and boxwoods work well in small spaces. Espalier trees are great for an outside wall, since they grow flat against the surface like a vine and are visually interesting.

If you don't have an outdoor area to play with, try planting small herbs or microgreens (small leafed vegetables that only grow a few inches high) on a windowsill. Castellanos says he's receiving more requests for edible plants lately, and some miniature fruit plants can even grow in pots as long as they get the sunlight they need to thrive.

Most importantly, don't be afraid to make changes if you find out something's not working for you.

"It was my first year with the landscaping on the roof deck, so there was definitely some trial and error. We will be making some changes for this season," Falk says. "Taking care of the garden is relaxing ... and seeing it flourish is rewarding." ●

**GUILLERMO'S TIPS**

**Conduct a site analysis.** Find out how to make the most out of your space, taking into account critical details like sunlight exposure.

**Create structural interest.** If you don't have a lot of room to build out, build up by incorporating arbors or trellises.

**Select plants carefully.** Learn how your plants will grow over time. Get rid of those that become too big and cumbersome for your space.

**Choose durable pots.** If you have to pot your plants, be sure to select ones made of durable material that won't break or become brittle during the winter.

**Water consistently.** It sounds simple, but a consistent watering routine is especially important for new gardens with plants adjusting to fresh soil.



# Café

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