



Growing Plants in Containers

Department of Horticulture

Container vegetables

Why grow plants in containers?

- You are in an apartment and don't have space for a garden
- You have a deck or a patio you want to grow plants on
- You may be moving and want to take the plants with you
- Kids enjoy watching plants grow in containers
- You may want to grow tender plants that will need to be moved indoors in the winter
- Container plants may be less work than a regular garden

What kind and size of container do you need?

Size: A large plant like a tomato needs at least a 3-gallon container. Smaller plants (like lettuce, some herbs, and flowers) may be able to use slightly smaller containers. A container should be modestly larger than the combined root balls of the plant or plants you put into them.

Unfilled space may retain too much water. Large containers can be used for vigorous vegetables plants like tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, or beans, even if their root balls are relatively small as they will quickly grow into the space. Container mixes need to be moist at planting. Water the container carefully to keep the potting mix moist but not soaked.

Type of container: The most important thing is that the container must have drainage holes. Plastic containers hold more moisture than clay pots, which means that they may not need to be watered as often but they can become waterlogged more easily. This can cause the plants to die!! You can use a 5-gallon bucket if you make enough good-

sized drainage holes in the bottom of the bucket.

What do you fill the container with?

Buy an all-purpose potting mix for containers. This is usually a combination of peat moss and/or wood fiber and perlite or vermiculite. The mix will give your plants the proper aeration around the roots.

Generally, you fill the container about 1/2 to 2/3 with potting mix before transplanting. Then put in the plant with the crown about an inch from the top of the pot.

Add more mix around the sides of the transplant (lightly compressing it as you go) until the mix comes to about an inch of the top of the container and even with the crown of the plant. Water plants well after transplanting.

You can start plants from seed directly in the container but you must be careful not to over or under water them in the critical first three weeks after planting. There are some summer squash (zucchini, yellow crookneck, etc.) that are bred to grow in small spaces and do very well in containers. Bush beans will grow without support but pole beans will need some type of trellis or netting at least 4 feet tall. Tomatoes also will need some support (like a tomato cage) to do well.

Eating fresh vegetables and herbs from your patio contributes to your health.

Picking fresh vegetables and herbs from your patio contributes to your health.

How do you feed and care for the plants?

Most potting mixes don't have much fertilizer in them. You can buy a product like Miracle Grow™, Schultz™ or liquid fish fertilizer and mix it up according to instructions. Then once a week you water with a fertilizer solution instead of plain water. This should give your plants what they need. As an alternative, you can put slow-release fertilizers like Osmocote™ into the mix following package instructions.

Watering is an art. The plants shouldn't be allowed to dry out nor should they be waterlogged. With a little practice, you will get it right. If you have a moisture meter to test the soil, it will help you get a feel for how often the containers need water.

Watch where you place the containers. The hottest place around your house is the southwest corner. On very hot days, you can "toast" your plants, especially if there is some reflected heat from the house wall. Place the containers where they get a lot of sun but get good air circulation as well.

Insects, slugs and diseases can be a concern in some situations. Keep an eye on your plants for early signs of problems. Contact your local Extension office for more information and management options.

Harvesting crops?

Many crops, like lettuce, greens and herbs, can be partially harvested as they grow. Other plants, like summer squash, tomatoes and peppers, need the first fruit to mature before harvest can begin.



Vegetable variety list for containers

Beans

Pole – Blue Lake, Kentucky Blue, Romano, Helda, Ruby Crest (all need a 5-6' trellis)
Bush – Bush Blue Lake, Roma II, Tendercrop, Oregon 54, Jade, Roma II, Derby, Nickel
Wax – Roc d'Or, Nugget, Romano Gold
Scarlet runner – Scarlet Emperor
Lima – Thorogreen, Fordhook

Beets

Round – Golden Beet, Detroit Dark Red, Chioggia, Red Ace, Ruby Queen
Cylindrical – Forona, Cylindra
Greens: Bull's Blood

Broccoli

Small Miracle, Munchkin, Packman
Harvested small for stems and mini-heads: Broccoli Raab (any variety), Gai Lan

Cabbage – Primax, Early Jersey Wakefield, Lasso

Carrots – Thumbelina, Parmex, Touchon, Little Finger, Minicore, Mokum, Rainbow, Nantes Half Long

Cauliflower – Snow Crown, Early Dawn

Cucumbers – Lemon, Salad Bush, Green Slam, Poinsett, Cucino (baby slicer), White Stallion. Trellis all.

Eggplant

Asian – Asian Bride, Green Goddess, Little Fingers, Fairy Tale, Ichiban, Dusky
Dwarf – Bambino, Twinkle



Greens

Swiss Chard – Fordhook Giant, Ruby Red, Bright Lights, Rhubarb, Golden Yellow

Kale – Lacinato/Tuscan types, Winterbor, Redbor, Dwarf Siberian

Lettuce – Oak Leaf, Baby Oak, Salad Bowl, Red Salad Bowl, Brunia, Red Sails, Ruby, Little Gem (and many other types)

Peas

Garden Peas – Oregon Pioneer, Green Arrow, Mr. Big, Oregon Trail (some varieties need support)

Snow Peas – Oregon Sugar Pod II, Oregon Giant Sugar Pod

Snap Peas – Sugarsnap, Super Sugar Snap, Cascadia, Sugar Sprint (some varieties need support)

Peppers

Green – Ace, Lipstick, Cal Wonder 300, Fat N' Sassy, Karma

Red – North Star, Gypsy, Carmen, Giant Marconi, Redskin

Miniature red – Jingle Bells, Cherrytime, Sweet Red Cherry

Orange – Valencia, Ariane, Mohawk (minature)

Yellow – Golden Summer

Purple – Purple Beauty, Lilac

Hot – Senorita Jalapeno, Super Cayenne II, Thai Dragon, Super Chile

Potatoes

Purple – All Blue

Yellow – Yukon Gold, Yellow Finn

Red – Dark Red Norland, Red Pontiac, Rose Finn Apple

Radishes

Cherry Belle, Easter Egg, French Breakfast, White Icicle, White Tuxedo, D'Avignon

Spinach

Melody, Bloomsdale Long Standing, Razzle Dazzle, Space, Tyee, Jive

Squash

Zucchini – Spacemiser, Eight Ball, Gold Rush, Salman, Sungreen, Raven

Crookneck – Yellow Crookneck, Sundance, Horn of Plenty, Fancycrook, Pic-N-Pic

Straightneck – Seneca Prolific, Zephyr

Pattypan – Sunburst, Balmoral

Pumpkin – Jack-Be-Little, Wee-B-Little, Baby Bear, New England Pie

Winter squash – Gold Nugget, Cream of the Crop, Bush Delicata

Tomatoes (all need tomato cages)

Full-size (3" diameter +) – Big Beef, Celebrity, Oregon Spring, Early Girl, Lemon Boy, Legend, Peron, Santiam, Siletz, Fantastic, Brandywine, Black Krim

Medium-size – Tumbler, Sweet Cluster, Italian Gold, Viva Italia, Pixie Hybrid, Super Bush Hybrid, Red Robin, Toy Boy, Early Cascade, Stupice

Cherry – Sun Gold, Oregon Cherry, Gold Nugget, Tiny Tim, Patio, Small Fry

Many other tomatoes are suitable for containers if given cage support.

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