



CONTAINER VEGETABLE GARDENING

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Many people who live in an apartment, condominium, or mobile home do not grow a vegetable garden because space is not available for a garden plot. Lack of yard space is no excuse for not gardening, since many kinds of vegetables can be readily grown in containers. In addition to providing five hours or more of full sun, attention must be given to choosing the proper container, using a good soil mix, planting and spacing requirements, fertilizing, watering, and variety selection.

Containers are available in many different sizes, shapes, and materials. All containers, whether clay, wood, plastic, or ceramic, should have an adequate number of holes in the bottom for proper drainage. Additional holes should be drilled or punched in containers that do not drain quickly after each watering. Drainage is reduced when the container is set on a solid surface such as a cement or patio floor. Raising the container one or two inches off the floor by setting it on blocks of wood will solve this drainage problem.

The size of the container will be determined by the vegetable grown. Generally, most vegetables grown in the soil can be grown in containers as long as ample space is provided for root development. Shallow rooted crops like lettuce, peppers, radishes, and herbs need a container at least 6 inches in diameter with an eight inch soil depth. Bushel baskets, half barrels, wooden tubs, or large pressed

paper containers are ideal for growing tomatoes, squash, pole beans, and cucumbers.

The ideal planting medium for containers should provide rapid drainage with sufficient water retention to keep the root zone uniformly moist. Most container gardeners have found that a "soilless" potting mix works best. In addition to draining quickly, "soilless" mixes are lightweight and free from soil-borne diseases and weed seeds. These mixes can be purchased from garden centers in various sizes under many different brand names.

The do-it-yourself individual can make a planting medium by mixing equal parts of sand, loamy garden soil, and peat moss. The mix should be heated in an oven for 1 hour at 210°F to kill any bacteria, fungi, insects, or weed seeds.

Planting and spacing requirements for most vegetables can be found on the seed packet or plant tag. A container can sustain only a certain number of plants, therefore, it is important to limit the number of plants based on the container size and the eventual size of the plant at maturity. Always plant more seed than needed in each container, because there is seldom 100% germination and emergence. After the seeds have sprouted and foliage of seedlings is touching, thin plants to the desired number.

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Regular fertilization applications using a complete analysis should be followed closely since soilless mixes contain little if any nutrients. There are many kinds of specially formulated fertilizers available. The most common N-P-K formulations are 5-10-10 and 10-10-10. Time-release fertilizer (Osmocote 14-14-14) that releases nutrients over a period of time can also be used. Since many gardeners are heavy-handed when it comes to applying fertilizer, it might be to the plant's advantage to apply fertilizer at *half* the label's recommendation twice as often.

Watering is one of the most important jobs a container gardener will perform. Some vegetables need watering

every day, depending on container size and weather conditions. The best way to water is with a watering can or sprayer attachment on a garden hose. Be sure the water is cool before applying it to the vegetables, particularly if the hose sits in the sun. Hot water does not stimulate root development.

Plant breeders have helped to make container vegetable gardening more practical by breeding plants with compact growth habits and relatively high crop yield. Almost any vegetable can be adapted to container culture. The following is a listing of some of the common container-grown vegetables, container sizes, and recommended varieties:

Vegetable	Type of Container	Recommended Varieties
Beans, snap	5 gal window box	Bush Romano, Bush Blue Lake, Tender Crop
Beans, Lima	5 gal window box	Henderson Bush, Jackson, Wonder Bush
Beets	5 gal window box	Little Egypt, Early Red Ball
Broccoli	1 plant/5 gal pot; 3 plants/15 gal tub	Green Comet, DeCicco
Brussels Sprouts	1 plant/5 gal pot; 2 plants/15 gal tub	Jade Cross
Cabbage	1 plant/5 gal pot; 3 plants/15 gal tub	Dwarf Morden, Red Ace, Early Jersey Wakefield
Chinese Cabbage	1 plant/5 gal pot; 3 plants/15 gal tub	Michihili, Burpee Hybrid
Carrot	5 gal window box at least 12 inches deep	Short & Sweet, Danvers Half Long, Tiny Sweet
Cucumber	1 plant/gal pot	Patio Pik, Spacemaster, Pot Luck
Eggplant	5 gal pot	Slim Jim, Ichiban, Black Beauty
Lettuce	5 gal window box	Salad Bowl, Ruby
Onion	5 gal window box	White Sweet Spanish, Yellow Sweet Spanish
Pepper	1 plant/2 gal pot; 5 plants/15 gal tub	Sweet Banana, Yolo Wonder, Long Red Cayenne
Radish	5 gal window box	Cherry Belle, Icicle
Spinache	5 gal window box	Dark Green Bloomsdale
Squash	2 gal pot	Scallopini
Tomatoes	Bushel baskets; 5 gal pots	Tiny Tim, Small Fry, Sweet 100 Patio, Burpee's Pixie, Toy Boy, Early Girl, Better Boy VFN