



## CONTAINER VEGETABLE GARDENING

window boxes, baskets lined with plastic (with drainage holes punched in it), even pieces of drainage pipe or cinder block.

### Quick Facts...

- An advantage of container gardening is its portability and suitability for many lifestyles.
- Container gardens allow creative expression in small spaces.
- Container gardens are excellent for beginners as well as advanced gardeners.
- Consider container gardens for vegetables, herbs, and concentrations of flower color and fragrance in small spaces.
- The disadvantages of container gardens are their need for frequent watering and fertilization.

Container gardens are one of the fastest growing segments of gardening. Containers can be grown where traditional gardens are not possible including apartment balconies, small courtyards, decks, patios, and areas with poor soil. They are an ideal solution for people in rental situations, with limited mobility, or with limited time to care for a large landscape.

### Choosing a Container

There are many possible containers for gardening. Clay, wood, plastic and metal are some of the suitable materials. Containers for vegetable plants must: (1) be big enough to support plants when they are fully grown, (2) hold soil without spilling, (3) have adequate drainage, and (4) never have held products that would be toxic to plants or people. Consider using barrels, flower pots,

If you are building a planting box out of wood, you can use rot-resistant redwood, cedar or cypress. Whatever type of container you use be sure that there are holes in the bottom for drainage so that plant roots do not stand in water. Most plants need containers at least 6 to 8 inches deep for adequate rooting.

### Growing Media (Soil Mixes)

A fairly lightweight potting mix is needed for container vegetable gardening. Soil straight from the garden usually cannot be used in a container because it may be too heavy, unless your garden has sandy loam or sandy soil. Container medium needs to be porous because roots require both air and water. Packaged potting soil available at local garden centers is relatively lightweight and may make a good container medium. For a large container garden the expense of prepackaged or soilless mixes may be quite high. Try mixing your own with one part peat moss, one part potting soil and one part clean coarse builder's sand or perlite and a slow-release complete fertilizer. Lime may also be needed to bring the pH to around 6.5. In any case, a soil test is helpful in determining nutrient and pH needs, just as in a large garden.

### Seeding and Transplanting

Best suited for container culture are vegetables which may be easily transplanted. Transplants may be purchased from local nurseries or can be grown at home. One can also germinate his/her own Seeds. The seed should be started in a warm area that receives sufficient sunlight about 4 to 8 weeks prior to the anticipated

transplanting date into the final container. Most vegetables should be transplanted into containers when they develop their first two to three true leaves. Transplanting should be done carefully to avoid injury to the young root system. If cages, stakes, or other supports are needed, provide them when the plants are very small to avoid later root damage.

### **Fertilizing**

If you use a soil mix with fertilizer added, then your plants will have enough nutrients for 8 to 10 weeks. If plants are grown longer than this, add a water-soluble fertilizer at the recommended rate. Repeat every two to three weeks. An occasional dose of fish emulsion or compost will add trace elements to the soil. Do not add more than the recommended rate of any fertilizer, since this may cause fertilizer burn and kill the plants. Container plants do not have the buffer of large volumes of soil and humus to protect them from over-fertilizing or over-liming. Just because a little is good for the plant does not guarantee that a lot will be better.

### **Watering**

Proper watering is essential for a successful container garden. Generally one watering per day is adequate. However, poor drainage will slowly kill the plants. The mix will become water-logged and plants will die from lack of oxygen. If at all possible, avoid wetting the foliage of plants since wet leaves will encourage plant diseases. Always remember that each watering should be done with the nutrient solution except for the weekly leaching with tap water.

### **Light**

Nearly all vegetable plants will grow better in full sunlight than in shade. However, leafy crops such as lettuce, cabbage, greens, spinach and parsley can tolerate more shade than root crops such as radishes, beets,

turnips and onions. The root vegetables can stand more shade than those which bear fruit, such as cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes and eggplant. One advantage to container gardening is mobility. Container gardening makes it possible to position the vegetables in areas where they can receive the best possible growing conditions.

### **Diseases and Insects**

Vegetables grown in containers can be attacked by the various types of insects and diseases that are common to any vegetable garden. Plants should be periodically inspected for the presence of foliage and fruit-feeding insects as well as the occurrence of diseases. Should problems occur, then the timely application of EPA-approved fungicides and insecticides is advised. Contact your local county Extension agent for the latest information on disease and insect control on vegetable plants.

### **General Care**

Protect plants from very high heat caused by light reflection from pavement. Move them to a cool spot or shade them during the hottest part of the day. Move plants to a sheltered location during severe rain, hail or windstorms and for protection from fall frosts.

### **Harvesting**

For the greatest amount of enjoyment from a container garden, harvest the vegetables at their peak of maturity when a vegetable's full flavor has developed. This will yield maximum pleasure from the excellent taste of vine-ripened tomatoes, tender green beans and crisp flavorful lettuce.

**For more information, please contact  
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