



How-To: GARDENING IN CONTAINERS

Growing a container garden can place plants in the best light, away from pest animals, and at a convenient height or location. With a little preparation and care, container gardens can be a great way to grow food and flowers!



START RIGHT

1. Ensure the container has good drainage and place saucers under each container to keep soil and water from leaching out too quickly. Line large holes with newspaper
2. Use containers that are appropriately-sized for the plants you want to grow (see the chart below). As a general rule, the larger the container, the better.
3. Place containers in a location with 6 hours of sunlight per day (lettuce and spinach can handle 4 hours/day), with access to water, and protection from wind.
4. Fill with the right potting mix for the container.

- For containers under 18" choose "soil-less mix."
- For containers over 18" choose "container blend."
- Add additional compost (up to 50%) to the potting mix for fertility and soil structure.
- Use this mix for extra-large containers:
 - 2, 5 gal buckets compost
 - ½ bucket vermiculite
 - ¼ bucket peat
 - ⅛ bucket sand

5. Select plants with compact growth habits and good disease resistance (see chart below).

MAINTAINING CONTAINER GARDENS

1. Water at least once a day. Smaller containers dry out more quickly than large ones.
2. Maintain steady soil moisture with a mulch of leaves, straw or dried grass clippings.
3. Protect from too much sun exposure. If plants wilt from too much direct sun, use shade cloth or move into shade for part of the day.
4. Add a balanced fertilizer regularly during the season. Some organic options include fish emulsion and seaweed.
5. Trellis crops as needed. If possible, secure the trellis to a larger structure, to keep the container from tipping on a windy day.



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SELF-WATERING CONTAINERS

Self-watering containers include a reservoir that holds water. The potting mix gradually wicks this water up to the plant roots, as needed. These containers significantly cut back on watering, making container garden maintenance much easier.

There are many pre-fabricated planters available for sale. Or, create your own! Check out the Mother Earth News article *Build a Self-Watering Container*, the University of Maryland Extension's *Self-Watering Containers* article, or search the web for your favorite design.



DIAGRAM OF A SELF-WATERING CONTAINER

9" Container Depth	12" Container Depth	18" Container Depth
BEETS	BROCCOLI	BEANS
LETTUCE	CABBAGE	CUCUMBERS
ONIONS	CAULIFLOWER	POTATOES
RADISHES	CHERRY/PATIO TOMATO	ZUCCHINI & SQUASHES
SPINACH	EGGPLANT	TOMATOES
SWISS CHARD	PEAS	
HERBS	PEPPERS	

SELECTING PLANTS

Many plants can grow in containers, as long as they have enough space. For smaller containers, use smaller plants. Crops that are well-suited to their container size will be healthier, meaning they will yield more and take less work! Also note that herbs tend to grow very well in containers, and many types of crops are available in compact varieties.



A TOMATO PLANT GROWING IN A HAND-BUILT, SELF-WATERING CONTAINER

<i>Instead of big plants like this one...</i>	<i>Grow these smaller ones!</i>
SQUASH	LEMON OR LITTLE LEAF CUCUMBER
CUCUMBER	MOUSE MELON
FRUIT TREES	CURRANTS, FIGS
RASPBERRIES	STRAWBERRIES
BEANS	BEANSPROUTS
INDETERMINATE TOMATOES	PATIO OR DETERMINATE VARIETIES
SWEET PEPPERS	HOT PEPPERS
ONIONS	CHIVES
KALE	LETTUCE OR MESCLUN MIX