

Vegetable Container Gardening

If you are like a lot of folks, you have a limited area in which to vegetable garden. Consider raising fresh, nutritious vegetables in containers. A windowsill, deck, patio or porch will provide space enough for a productive mini-garden. It is important to have at least six hours of sun per day. Some plants require more, some less.

Choosing Containers

Anything goes as a container, but shape is an important factor. The top should be wider than the bottom, for ease of emptying at harvest time. Terracotta pots are the most popular and work well because they are porous so both water and air can penetrate. This prevents over-watered plants from drowning. However, you need to water these pots more often because they dry out sooner. If you decide to use wooden whiskey barrels, redwood planters, metal buckets or old kettles, remember to drill holes for drainage. Whatever you choose, allow the plant's root ball 2 inches of space on the sides and 6 inches at the bottom. Remember to raise containers off the porch or patio by using bricks, flat stones or pot feet. If you do not like the color of your containers, consider painting to coordinate with surroundings. For a more aged look to your stone or terracotta pots, brush them with buttermilk or yogurt and place in the shade for a few weeks. This will encourage algae and moss growth.

Choosing and Buying Plants

Many vegetables can be grown quite successfully in containers, such as beans, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cucumber, onion, greens, peppers, potatoes, tomatoes and turnips. Certain varieties are better suited for container growing than others. When selecting plants, consider the size of pot you intend to plant it in. Make a list of plants you want to grow and stick to it. It is easy to get carried away. Check leaves for signs of pests or disease. Look at the bottom of the plant to determine whether it is root-bound or not. Select only the most healthy specimens.

Potting your Plants

Plan out your containers' arrangement carefully before hand, to allow for a pleasing and harmonious group of differing sizes, shapes and textures. Be sure you know which direction the sun faces. Put your large containers in place before filling. Then fill in with smaller pots in front. Plan to hide any unsightly walls or other items. Think about taller plants in back, as well as climbers, while focusing on trailing plants and short ones in front. Don't worry if the pots look a bit bare when first planted; they will fill out quickly.

Choosing the Growing Medium

An important factor to consider when deciding what medium to grow your vegetables in, is to be sure it is free of disease and weed seeds. Synthetic soils are best for this. These mixes can be made of peat moss, perlite, vermiculite, pumice and other media. They hold moisture and nutrients, while allowing good drainage. Most are

lightweight, as well. Since these mixes are sterile, it is important to provide appropriate nutrients for your plants. Another benefit of synthetic soil in containers is that it warms up faster than soil in the ground. This will enable you to get your peppers or tomatoes off to a faster start.

Feeding & Watering Container Plants

Some folks prefer slow-release granular forms of fertilizer that are mixed into the soil before planting, followed by periodic liquid applications. Others prefer dry organic mix added at planting time. Both work great. What is important is to follow the package directions for application frequency and quantity.

Proper watering is critical to successful gardening. Container pots dry out more quickly than plants in the ground, therefore they need to be watered daily. If at all possible, avoid watering foliage, since wet leaves encourage disease growth. If you partner different plants in a single container, consider their individual watering and fertilizing requirements.

Overwintering

Plants are not the only things that need protection. Some containers, especially terracotta pots may crack if exposed to repeated frost and rain. Try turning the pot on its side and wrapping with burlap sacking. This gives excellent protection through the winter. Or bind plastic bubble wrap around them. Most vegetables are annuals and many will have been harvested from the containers by winter. Any vegetables remaining in pots to overwinter, such as broccoli, are hardy enough to survive cold and frost.

Plant Varieties for Container Growing

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, Burpless, Liberty, Early Pik
Eggplant	5 gal pot	Slim Jim, Ichiban, Black Beauty, Florida Market, Long Tom

Vegetable	Type of Container	Recommended Varieties
Lettuce	5 gal window box	Salad Bowl, Ruby, Romaine, Bibb, Buttercrunch
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, Red Cherry, Jalapeno
Radish	5 gal window box	Cherry Belle, Icicle, Scarlet Globe
Spinach	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, Small Fry, Spring Giant

References

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