

Growing Vegetables in Containers

If you have limited space or want to put vegetables in a handy spot, consider growing them in containers.

What kind of container?

- Bigger is better, but you can grow small plants (herbs, for instance) in a 1-gallon pot.
- You can use any container that has not previously contained toxic material. Lightweight plastic is easy to move around and work with. Repurposed containers are fine e.g., 5-gallon buckets.
- Deeper pots maintain moisture better and provide room for larger plants.
- Be sure there is good drainage! Add 3-5 holes to the bottom if there are none.
- Do not put rocks, or other debris in the bottom of the pot. This creates drainage problems and limits the soil for the plants' roots.

What soil?

- Use commercial potting soil. It's sterile and lightweight. Garden soil tends to compact.

What to grow?

- Most vegetables will grow well in pots and you can crowd some plants more than in an open garden. Air circulation is still important to keep down pest and disease problems.
- Herbs are great in pots (and you can put the pot where it's handy).
- Consider size and spacing of mature plants when deciding what will grow in a pot. (Use spacing recommendations on seed packets.)

How much can I grow?

- In a 1-gallon pot: 1 lettuce or chard plant, a bunch of parsley, or basil.
- In a 5-gallon pot: 1 tomato or squash or broccoli, or 2 peppers, or 15 carrots or beets, or a salad bowl of closely spaced lettuce plants to cut and allow to regrow ("cut and come again")
- Check the resources below for more information on what fits in what size pot.

How do I care for my containers?

- Pots need more water and more frequent watering than garden beds, as they dry out more easily. Check at least daily.
- Fertilize pots more frequently but with a weaker fertilizer than garden beds.
- Provide support for plants that need it (peas, beans, tomatoes, etc.). Pots allow you to grow vertically or spill over the sides.
- Check regularly for pests or disease. Containers make it easy.
- Follow ordinary recommendations for growing vegetables. See the publication *Home Vegetable Gardening in Washington* under Resources below, an essential resource for growing vegetables.

Resources:

Home Vegetable Gardening in Washington, WSU Publication:

<https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2071/2014/04/Home-Vegetable-Gardening-in-WA-EM>

The Myth of Drainage Material in Container Planting:

<https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/403/2015/03/container-drainage.pdf>

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