

## Almost Any Vegetable Can Be Grown in Containers

Virtually any vegetable can be grown in containers. Growing in containers increases one's ability to grow vegetables and herbs, as containers can be placed in locations where gardening is not typically possible such as on balconies and porches or adjacent to your driveway.

They can be used in shady and sunny areas around your house that don't have adequate quality soil for growing.

Further, as the year progresses, you can move the containers to the best area for the plant to grow. For example, lettuce requires only four hours of sunlight and prefers cooler temperatures, so as the temperature warms up you can move the lettuce container to the shady side where temperatures will be lower than in direct sun.

Containers come in all types of materials. Recently, fabric pots have become popular. They are made of a type of BPA-free, breathable material, usually double-layer polypropylene, similar to landscaping fabric.

I personally favor these for growing vegetables for a variety of reasons. First, they protect root systems from diseases, pests and harsh weather. They are lightweight, washable and reusable. They can be used for virtually all vegetables except those that grow like ground cover such as winter squash, melons, or with extensive root systems, like asparagus.

Traditional containers like plastic can be quite tricky especially when dealing with watering plants. If the container has too-large drainage holes, the soil and nutrients will be washed away along with the excess water when you water the plants.

Fabric bags allow the excess water to pass through the material without washing away the soil. Additionally, the fabric is breathable, allowing proper air circulation, which is important as the roots need exposure to the air to obtain oxygen.

Root growth is typically much healthier in fabric pots since when the roots reach the edge where they are exposed directly to air, they stop growing — in essence they are air pruned. In traditional containers the roots do not come in direct contact with the air, so they keep growing and become encircled, turning the root system into a tangled mess, which inhibits absorption of nutrients.

The advantages to container gardening are that you can completely control what goes into the growing medium. There is no need to worry about any form of pollution in the growing medium, very little weeding is needed, and it is possible for almost anyone. Regular watering will be needed, and the soil will need to be replenished and amended with fertilization.

If your container is more than 12 inches deep, you can use a filler such as leaves, straw, coconut coir, sand or perlite. Soil from your garden or yard will be too dense for growing in a container. It is best to use something like potting soil, which will contain a mixture of organic matter,

minerals, and perlite or vermiculite. It will hold water better as well as provide air spaces for the roots.

If possible, add some compost to the container. Ideally you should replace the potting soil in your containers each year. One option is to amend the old soil mix with a minimum of 30% new potting soil or container soil.

Herbs such as basil, sage, tarragon, cilantro and chives do well in small containers between 1 quart to one-half gallon in size. Lettuce is shallow-rooted and needs a container only 6 inches deep. Head lettuce like romaine and butter lettuce can be grown as single plants in an 8-inch pot. Leaf lettuce can be scattered in a larger pot and then thinned to be used as baby mix, creating space for individual plants to mature.

Tomatoes do well in containers. Cherry tomatoes and dwarf varieties will do well in a 5-gallon container. Larger varieties, whether they are determinate or indeterminate, will benefit from being in 10 gallon or larger container and will need some form of support.

When you put the tomato seedling in the pot, that is the time to put in a support system such as tomato cage or stakes. Be sure to water them regularly — perhaps as often as daily. If you don't water regularly, then blossom end rot is more likely to occur. Also, fertilize the tomatoes regularly — as often as twice monthly using a balanced fertilizer such as 5-5-5 or 5-10-5.

Cucumbers can be grown in containers that are 12 to 16 inches deep and 12 to 14 inches in diameter so the plant can spread out. You will need some sort of trellis for the cucumber vine to climb.

If you want pickling cucumbers, "Picklebush" is a good option for container growing. If you want a smooth-skinned type, then look for patio snacker or salad bush. Bush type cucumbers such as "Parks Bush Whopper," "Pot Luck" and "Spacemaster" are good options, as they grow to only about 2 to 3 feet long.

Peppers and eggplant do well in containers 3 to 5 gallons and at least 18 inches deep in size. There are a number of varieties of each that have been developed specifically for container growing, and often they are named as such. For example, patio baby eggplant or baby bell peppers.

Other vegetables that are easily grown in containers include bush beans, kale, Swiss chard, spinach, scallion and collards.

To learn more, check out these University Extension department sites:

<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-336/426-336.html>

<https://extension.wvu.edu/lawn-gardening-pests/gardening/creative-gardening/container-gardening>

<https://growforit.ces.ncsu.edu/2020/05/container-gardening-is-for-everyone/>