

## Patio Container Vegetable Gardening

Q. I recently downsized to a patio home and do not have a place for a vegetable garden anymore. Is there a way I can grow vegetables, particularly tomatoes? How would this be different than "in-the-ground" gardening?

A: Yes, you can continue to grow your tomatoes in your new patio home as well as any other vegetable that will fit in your space. Sunlight is important so make sure you have six to eight hours of it each day. You may have to move your containers around to achieve the right amount.

There are endless combinations of containers you can use for your small space garden. Be creative: old buckets, watering cans and pots could be modified and used. You can use terra cotta, plastic, or wood. There are even small raised-bed gardens available for your space. Remember that most plants do not like "wet feet," so whatever container you use, they should always have drain holes in them. Also be mindful that container color is important as darker colors tend to heat up in the summer and dry your soil quickly. The size your containers is important. Think of the mature size of your plant. For example, a tomato plant would probably do better in a 5-gallon bucket rather than in a smaller pot.

You may be tempted to fill your patio garden pots with soil from your yard, but you should always buy good potting soil for your containers. Potting soil will drain better and hold the right amount of moisture for potted plants. Replace soil every year to prevent the spread of disease and to get rid of any insects that may have taken up residence.

Water your patio plants regularly and not just the surface. Remember that the summer sun is warming your pots up and water will evaporate much faster. Using a fertilizer is also recommended and always mix according to the manufacturer's instructions. Some potting soils have fertilizer in them as well, so be sure and read all the information on the bag before you plant.

To help get you started, the TSUUT Extension website has a publication for growing container tomatoes. *Container Tomatoes for the Tennessee Gardener*, publication D 142 can be found at this link <https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/D142.pdf>. There are many more publications at <https://utextensionanr.tennessee.edu/>, click on publications, and search for any gardening topic.

Good luck with your patio garden!

The Master Gardeners of Northeast Tennessee