

Garden to Table Series – Growing in Containers

Container gardening is one of the easiest ways to start a home vegetable garden! You can grow an amazing variety of vegetables (and even fruits) in containers, from tomatoes and peppers to lettuce, zucchini, even strawberries and lemons! And the best part? You don't have to dig up heavy soil, or even have a lot of room. A container garden can fit on a patio or deck, or even right by your front door. You won't have to go far to pick dinner.

# Choosing the Right Container

1. Good containers for planting include half barrels, inexpensive plastic pots, glazed clay pots, 5-gallon buckets (the handle makes them easy to carry or move), or other good-sized, recycled containers.
2. Larger containers (at least 10 inches in diameter and 10 inches deep) hold in soil moisture and provide more room for plant roots. Keep in mind, the larger the pot, the more soil, and the heavier it will be to move.
3. Make sure your pot has drainage holes and add some if not by drilling several holes in the bottom.

# Using the Right Soil

1. Use good quality soil or organic soil – specifically designed for containers – do not use soil from the ground it is too heavy for container planting and does not contain the nutrients your plants will need.

# Planting

1. What can I grow in my pot? Measure the pot across the top – see below for examples of what will fit:
	1. 8” – 1 lettuce, spinach, kale, or bean, or 3 basil, cilantro, or parsley, or 1 sage, oregano, or mint plant.
	2. 10” – 1 determinate tomato, 1 pepper plant, 1 bush cucumber, or 8-12 green onion, beets, radishes, or carrots
	3. 12” – 1 summer squash, 2 pepper plants, 6 pea or bush bean plants
	4. 1’ square or 18” – 1 tomato w/ 4 basil or cilantro or parsley, 2 summer squash, 4 cucumbers, or 4-6 lettuce
2. Seeds or transplants?
	1. Seeds – check package for container variety, start seeds in seeds indoor – once hardened off can be transplanted to containers. Plant each seed 2-3 times the seed width in seed starting soil.
	2. Transplants – purchased locally, give room to grow (check the label for size once mature), they can be delicate so handle gently. If multiple together, can be separated by soaking in water for a few minutes.
3. Where to put the container? Most vegetable plants need 6-8 hours of sunlight a day – but here are some guidelines if you have less sun:
	1. Leafy vegetables such as lettuce, endive, arugula, spinach, kale, chard, basil, and cilantro will tolerate partial shade and do well with as little as 3 hours of sun.
	2. Vegetables grown for their roots or flowers need about 4 hours - try beets, carrots, radishes, or broccoli.
	3. Plants grown for the harvested fruit - tomatoes, melon, peppers, squash, and eggplant require more sun and warmth – optimally they like 6 to 10 hours of sun.

# How to Keep them Alive!

1. Water – by hand or set up a drip system. Keep in mind, vegetables need more water than other types of plants – use a moisture meter to check the moisture level.
2. Fertilizer – use a general fertilizer (NKP (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) 12-12-12 is fine.
3. Lightly fertilizer 1 to 2 times per month – don’t over fertilize or you may burn the roots.
4. Pest control – raise the pot out of critter reach or use netting (with holes for pollinators).

# Resources

* UC ANR - Master Gardeners of Ventura County - https://ucanr.edu/sites/VCMG/
* UC ANR Home Gardening- Home Page - https://ucanr.edu/sites/vric3/Home\_gardening/
* UCANR Vegetable Gardening- https://rng.ucanr.edu/Gardening/Vegetable/UCDavis