



Vegetables & Herbs in Containers

Information provided by Little Red Nursery
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Growing vegetables in containers opens up tons of possibilities, and you can even plant and harvest exciting and tasty varieties you won't normally find at the grocery store. Even if you only have a small space available on your porch or patio, you can create an edible container garden.

CONTAINER:

Both the type and size of container can affect the care your garden needs, so be sure to pick pots that will work for the space you have and the veggies you want to grow. The only basic requirements are that the pot is large enough to hold the plant and that it has drainage holes so excess water can escape. Good drainage is essential! If a pot lacks holes, you can drill three or four in the bottom to allow flow. Containers without saucers can be raised off the surface of a deck or patio by placing them on decorative "feet" or pieces of wood. If you place saucers under containers, be sure to empty water from the saucer. Plants in terracotta (clay) need more attention to watering than other types of pots, because of the porous nature of the material. Also think about the color. Dark colors absorb heat, so they may make the soil too warm for some vegetable crops in summer, especially in hot-summer areas. When it comes to size, the bigger the pot is, the better, especially for beginners. The reason for this is that large pots hold more soil and will hold moisture longer so you don't have to water as much. It's best to choose large pots about 2 to 8 inches in diameter, 20 to 30 inches in diameter for tomatoes and peppers. This will provide sufficient space for the plants roots and prevent the plants from drying out as quickly. Plants that grow tall or produce vines (like tomatoes and cucumbers) will be more productive if they're grown with a support in the container. Something as simple as a wire cage inserted into the container at planting time will work.

SOIL:

Use only good quality, light-weight potting soil in vegetable and herb container gardening. Like most other container gardens, your veggies will do best in potting mixes made for containers. Fill the containers so the soil is at least 2-3 inches below the rim (that extra space at the top will give you room to water deeply without overflowing the container). Water the soil just before planting.

PLANTING:

Depending on what types of vegetables or herbs you want to grow, you can start seeds in your containers, grow transplants from seeds started indoors, or purchase transplants from a garden center. Start container garden crops such as beans, corn, carrots, radishes, and spinach from seeds sown directly in the container. Keep the soil where you've sowed evenly moist until the seeds germinate. Leave 3-4 inches of space in between each plant, and adjust according to the seed package directions. Because not all seeds will germinate, plant more than you need, then thin the excess later. Set transplants or starters at the same level they were growing in their pot (except for tomatoes, which you can pinch off their lower leaves and plant them deeper in the container). If you're planting transplants, gently loosen the root ball by tugging lightly at the roots before adding it to your container. Spread a thin layer of peat moss over the top of the container and around the plants to prevent moisture loss. Water planters as needed which could be daily. To test soil for dryness, poke your finger into the soil. If it feels dry to a depth of one inch, water thoroughly. Fertilize every three weeks with a liquid fertilizer unless you use a slow release fertilizer. This is especially important when tomatoes and peppers begin to flower. However, over fertilizing can lead to tall, leggy plants that do not produce well. Harvest ripe fruits promptly so plants continue to produce new growth.

Vegetables for containers: Carrots, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Lettuce, Peppers, Bush Beans, Radish, Spinach, Strawberries, Swiss Chard, Bush Tomatoes

Herbs for containers: Basil, Chives, Cilantro, Marjoram, Mints, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary, Sage, Sweet Bay and Thyme