

GARDENING IN CONTAINERS

Don't have a yard or enough space for a garden? Not a problem! Even the smallest outdoor nook can sport a thriving crop of vegetables, herbs, and flowers in containers. With some creative thinking and recycled materials from baskets to old shoes, your kids can entice butterflies and other insect visitors, and hopefully produce some tasty treats! Unlike conventional gardens where plants are well rooted in place, containers offer flexibility; you can move them to meet your kids' needs or the plants' needs.



Plants emerging from terra-cotta or plastic pots, window boxes, or hanging baskets are common refrains, and they make great growing vessels. But let's also think outside the box. Practically any type of container can be used to grow plants as long as it holds soil, can drain water, and is large enough to accommodate the plants you're growing. You are only limited by your imaginations. Consider these planter possibilities:

buckets, tubs, beach pails, ceramic bowls, teapots, stacks of old tires, crocks, baskets, ceramic flue tiles, half wooden barrels, crates, sinks and bathtubs, toys (football helmet, dump truck, wagon). Better yet, have your kids brainstorm their own list. Here are some things to consider when choosing containers:

The larger the container, the larger the plant (or number of plants) you can grow to maturity. Take vessels for veggies. A half barrel planter can accommodate large tomatoes, squash, or eggplant, with room to spare for small crops such as carrots or lettuce. Five-gallon containers are fine for dwarf tomatoes, peppers, beans, and other vegetables and herbs. You can raise a mini salad or herb garden in an 18-inch (diameter) pot. Soil depth is also important. Deep-rooted plants like tomatoes need at least 12 inches of soil, but radishes can get by with as little as 4 inches. Window boxes should be at least 9 inches deep. (See the attached chart for more on container sizes.)



Drain it! Containers need to have some way to drain water away from plant roots. If a container doesn't already have drainage holes, and they would be easy to make, you can put in 1/2-inch holes at or near the bottom. If holes are at the bottom, make sure there's space underneath for the water to drain out. You might have to raise planting containers up on bricks or blocks. If you

put holes in the side an inch or so from the bottom, extra water can remain in the reservoir. To keep from losing soil if holes are large, line your containers with newspaper or nylon mesh window screening, which will also prevent pests from entering. If your container has no drainage holes and it isn't practical to make them, you can place a smaller container with drainage holes inside the first one.



If you have a container that won't hold onto soil or water well, such as a woven basket or old boot with holey soles, you can line it with thick plastic, bubble wrap (used for shipping), or a plastic milk jug or soda bottle, and punch drainage holes in the lining with a nail or pencil. Wire hanging baskets lined with sphagnum moss retain moisture, but also enable water to naturally drain. Note: If you're using containers that have previously been used to grow plants or had unusual substances in them, clean them with an environmentally friendly disinfectant or soak them in a solution of 1 part bleach to 10 parts warm water before planting.

Think about going vertical! Consider creating garden vessels for vining plants such as pole beans, cucumbers, gourds, morning glory, clematis, sweet potato vine, star jasmine, or passion flower. Challenge kids to create a trellis or supports and to figure out how to keep an upright plant jungle well-watered and fed. Do they notice any patterns in how plants climb or how tendrils function? Can they coax the plants to change direction?

So, if your vegetable gardening is limited by insufficient space or an unsuitable area, consider raising fresh, nutritious, homegrown vegetables in containers. A window sill, patio, balcony or a doorstep will provide sufficient space for a productive mini-garden. Container vegetable gardening is a sure way to introduce children to the joys and rewards of vegetable gardening!



| A Few Good (Container) Candidates | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Vegetable | Good Container Varieties | Container Size | Final Plant Spacing (inches) | Light Requirements | Minimum Soil Depth (inches) |
| Beans, Bush | Provider Tender Crop Top Crop | Medium | 2 to 3 | Sun | 6 |
| Beets | Little Mini Ball Early Red Ball Little Egypt | Medium | 2 to 3 | sun | 6 |
| Broccoli | DeCicco Green Comet Green Valiant | Large | Single plant | Sun | 10 |
| Carrots | Thumbelina Minicor Royal Nantes | Small/medium | 1 | Sun | 8 |
| Cucumbers | Early Pik Bush Pickle Spacemaster | Large | 14 to 18 | Sun | 10 |
| Eggplant | Slim Jim Pirouette Black Beauty | Large | Single plant | Sun | 10 |
| Lettuce | Salad Bowl Buttercrunch Ruby | Medium | 4 to 6 | Partial shade | 6 |
| Onion | Sweet Spanish Tokyo Long White Any Onion Sets | Small | 2 to 3 | Partial shade | 8 |
| Pepper | Ace Sweet Banana Super Chile (hot) | Large | Single plant | Sun | 8 |
| Potato | Red Pontiac Yellow Finn Butterfinger | Large | Single plant | Sun | Start with 10" of soil in 30" deep container |
| Radish | Easter Egg Cherry Belle | Small | 1 | Partial shade | 4 |

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|----------------------|--|-----------------|--------------|---------------|---------|
| | Icicle | | | | |
| Summer Squash | Gold Rush Scallopini Roly Poly | Large | Single plant | Sun | 10 |
| Swiss Chard | Bright Lights Fordhook Giant Silverado | Medium | 4 to 6 | Partial shade | 8 |
| Tomato | Early Girl Superboy Sun Gold Tiny Tim (dwarf) Patio (dwarf) Tumbling Tom (for baskets) | Large Medium | Single plant | Sun | 12 8 |
| Winter Squash | Bush Delicata Cream of the Crop Butterbush | Large | Single plant | Sun | 10 |

Herbs: They do well in window boxes or containers mixed with veggies and flowers, or in their own container groupings. Try herbs like mints and oregano in hanging baskets. Explore some or all of these options: basil, chives, mints, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, summer savory, marjoram, tarragon, and thyme.