



Container Vegetable Gardening in the Central Valley

Los Banos Spring Fair 2026 - Dennis B, UC Master Gardener of Merced County

Why Container Gardening?

We often are asked how to grow vegetables and herbs when conditions are limited. Container Gardening is the answer.

- Works in poor or compacted soils
- Is portable and flexible
- Ideal for apartments and patios
- Helps avoid invasive weeds like Bermuda grass
- Allows precise control of soil, water, and nutrients

Types of Containers

There are three general types of containers -

1. Traditional Pots & Planters
 - Made of plastic, ceramic, wood
 - Must have drainage holes
2. Grow Bags
 - Breathable fabric → healthier roots
 - Excellent drainage
 - Stay cooler in heat
 - Portable and reusable
3. Tower/Vertical Systems
 - Stack containers vertically
 - Great for small spaces and apartments
 - Efficient use of space



Backyard Vegetable and Herb Container Garden in Los Banos



This backyard vegetable garden in Los Banos uses four towers (vertical system) and four grow bags to grow strawberries, thyme, oregano, chives, lettuce, onions, and garlic.

When the temperatures rise to 100 degrees or more, provide shade and ensure the plants have sufficient water.

Success checklist

- ✓ Use quality potting mix
- ✓ Water consistently
- ✓ Fertilize Regularly
- ✓ Ensure Good Drainage
- ✓ Match plant to container size.

Sunlight Needs

Most vegetables need 6–8 hours of sun per day. Move containers as needed. Provide shade during extreme heat.

Soil Recommendations

- Use **potting mix only** (never garden soil). The ideal mix includes
 - compost
 - coir or peat
 - perlite or vermiculite.
- Soil should be light, well-draining and moisture-retentive.
- Add granulated fertilizer at planting.
- Use water-based fertilizers when needed.

Best Crops for Containers

- Tomatoes
- Peppers
- Herbs
- Lettuce and Greens
- Strawberries

Watering Tips

- Containers dry out quickly → water frequently
- Keep soil consistently moist
- Water until it drains out bottom
- Water in the morning
- Consider drip irrigation

Apartment Gardening

Use balconies, patios, and windows. Try vertical systems, like the one shown here. Choose compact varieties of vegetables. Use saucers under containers on balconies to avoid “dripping” on your neighbor when watering.

Managing Bermuda Grass

- Use containers as a barrier
- Place on hard surfaces or pallets
- Containers prevent root invasion



Thyme, oregano, chives and lettuce in tower planter.

References/Resources

Photos and experience – Dennis B of UC Master Gardeners of Merced County

Container Gardening Basics Articles

<https://ucanr.edu/site/uc-master-gardeners-santa-clara-county/container-gardening-basics>

Spring Container Vegetable Gardening YouTube Video from UC Master Gardeners of Stanislaus County -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xj1KZ9EPgEc>

Questions? Call our Garden Helpline at 209-385-7403

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