



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, beets, carrots 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.

Choosing the Right Container

- 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.
- 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.
- Make sure your pot has drainage holes, if needed, you can drill several holes in the bottom – you can add netting to the bottom holes to keep out small critters, but don't add rocks in the bottom of the pot.

Using the Right Soil

- 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.
- Mix your own potting soil by mixing equal parts compost (nutrient source), perlite or vermiculite (aeration/drainage), and coconut coir or peat moss (moisture retention). Do not use garden soil alone; it is too heavy for containers. If adding topsoil, limit it to 10-15% of the total mix.

Planting

What can I grow in my pot? Measure the pot across the top – see below for examples of what will fit:

- 8" – 1 lettuce, spinach, or bush bean, or 3 basil, cilantro, or parsley, or 1 sage, oregano, or mint.
- 10" – 1 determinate tomato, 1 pepper plant, 1 bush cucumber, or 8-12 green onion, beets, radishes, or carrots
- 12" – 1 summer squash, 2 pepper plants, 6 pea or bush bean plants
- 1' square or 18" – 1 tomato w/ 4 basil, or parsley, 2 summer squash, 4 cucumbers, or 4-6 lettuce

Seeds or transplants?

- Seeds – need 6-8 weeks before planting. Verify on package if container variety, start seeds indoor, plant each seed 2-3 times the seed width in seed starting soil. Once hardened off they can be transplanted to container.
- Transplants – instant gratification. Purchased locally, give room to grow (check for size once mature), handle gently as they are delicate. If multiple plants - separate by soaking in a bucket of water to dissolve the soil.

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:

- 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.
- Vegetables grown for their roots or flowers need about 4 hours - try beets, carrots, radishes, or broccoli.
- 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.



Basic Care: QR code will take you to the Soil to Sprouts slide deck on the Ventura County Master Gardener website

- Seeds or Transplant – Transplants produce earlier harvest, look for multiple plants per pot.
- Mulch the Soil Surface – Apply a 3-4-inch layer of organic mulch.
- Watering – water deep - overhead watering can lead to diseases.
- Support - trellis, stake, or cage.
- Fertilizer – Use a General Purpose (10-10-10) fertilizer. High nitrogen fertilizer will increase green growth – not fruit.
- Using Raised Beds or Containers? – use potting soil or blend of compost/topsoil/vermiculite.



Learn more about the Ventura County Master Gardener using this QR to visit the website.

