

Container Gardening

EASY & FUN!

Let's get gardening!

By Agnes Burroughs, Master Gardener

If you don't have available space for a garden plot, containers might be your answer to fresh produce right at your back door.

Pots

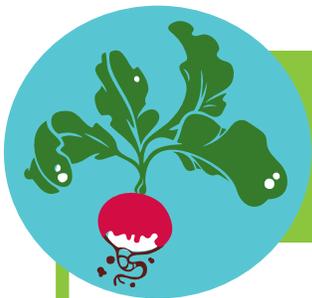
Lightweight plastic containers are ideal for vegetable gardens. Terra cotta pots tend to dry out more quickly and are heavy to move once filled with soil. The bigger the container the better, as a smaller pot of 8 inches in diameter will dry out faster and take considerably more watering than a 12 inch pot. The container should be at least 12 inches deep to allow lots of room for roots and a storage space for moisture. A variety of plants will fit into the 12 inch diameter, but for melons or cucumbers a pot twice that big would be necessary. A 5 gallon pail with a trellis will work well for the new bush variety cucumbers. Whatever pot you choose be sure it has plenty of drainage holes. Most seeds and plants require full sun, so a caddy is also very handy to move the containers once they are filled or your trees leaf out and shade the pot.

Soil

Purchased potting soil is the best bet for starter gardens. It can be obtained at garden centres, and is weed free, will drain well, will retain moisture and contains sufficient nutrients to get your plants growing. If you are lucky enough to have well composted soil from your composter, it can be placed in the bottom of the pot. The nutrients in the soil should last about 4 weeks, and then it is important to add a general purpose or balanced fertilizer (20-20-20).

Watering

Watering will be the most important job you do all summer--watering. It is a tricky balance between soggy and parched, but it can be done and the results are well worth it. Remember to water all the way around the pot, not in just one corner. Checking your pots and adding water in the morning or late afternoon without spraying the leaves, is the very best, as the plants have all day to enjoy the water, and withstand the heat of the sun. Nobody likes to



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sleep in a wet bed and plants feel the same way--watering at night tends to encourage mildew and disease, as there is no sun to dry them out, and they can't use the water as effectively at night as they aren't growing.

Plants & Seeds

If you start with seeds, be sure to read the seed packet ever so carefully. Seeds vary, so be sure to read the packet indicating depth of soil, spacing and maturity length to harvest. Seed packets or tags in purchased plants provide a lot of specific growing information. Plants can be somewhat easier, as they give you more immediate results for your efforts, and shorten the time to harvest. Garden centres stock huge varieties of plants. Plant outside after the May 24th weekend to avoid the danger of frost, which will kill the tender seedlings.

Some suggestions for container plants that do well:

- Beets, carrots, lettuce, onions, peppers, radishes
- For beans, tomato & cucumber choose bush varieties.

Harvest

Lettuce, radishes and onions are very quickly available for harvest-within 45 days. Lettuce and radish are quick growing seeds, easily harvested and very satisfying to a new gardener. However, tomatoes or potatoes can take up to three months to produce a crop. You will see the tomatoes mature, but the potatoes under the soil are a little trickier but once the leaves die off and turn yellow, you can be assured the potatoes are ready for harvest. Just dump them out scrub off the soil and enjoy.

