



Considerations for Container Gardening

Advantages:

- Ideal for small places
- Portable
- Great for beginning or experienced gardeners
- Can grow vegetables, herbs, or flowers

Disadvantages:

- Frequent watering and fertilization

**Location**

- Any level surface, such as decks, balconies, driveways, sidewalks, bare or mulched ground.
Note: To prevent staining the undersurface, use self-watering containers or plastic saucers to catch water that drains from them.
- Southern and western exposures have more sun than northern and eastern exposures.
- Overhangs, buildings or furniture can produce shade.
- Warm-season crops (tomato, pepper, eggplant, squash) need 6-8 hours of direct sun; Cool-season crops (lettuce, spinach, Asian greens) need 3-5 hours of direct sun.
- Close to water supply. Some containers will need watering every day when the weather is hot and dry.
- Consider the microclimate in the container garden area. Brick, concrete, and reflective surfaces can absorb heat, making the location hotter than the surrounding area.

Container selection

Treated wood containers or old tires should be used only for non-edible plants.

Drainage

- More water drains from many small holes than from one large hole. It's best to have quarter-inch holes every two to three inches of container bottom.
- Containers made from porous materials (clay and wood) lose moisture quickly, but usually prevent overwatering, a common problem with containers that can kill plants from root rot.

Material

- Lightweight- Plastic, resin, fabric, hypertufa, fiberglass, if on the smaller side, may be light enough to move. However, a 20-inch diameter plastic container filled with moist growing medium and plants can weigh 100 lbs.
- Heavy- Concrete, iron, stone, ceramic, clay (terracotta), wood barrels. Consider placing on wheels if they will need to be moved.
- Recycled materials- boots, shoes, washtubs, furniture, milk crates, wooden bushel baskets, wagons, carts, and toys
- Soil temperature fluctuates more in metal containers than non-metal ones. Dark colors absorb more heat than light-colored ones.

Size

- Smaller containers will dry out much faster than larger containers. If you don't want to water that often, select a larger volume container and one with solid side walls.

Shape

- Square pots or pots with straight sides are more stable than traditional-shaped (inverted cone) pots, and are less likely to tip over in wind.

Soil Mix

- Needs to be well aerated and well drained while still being able to retain enough moisture for plant growth.
- Use soilless or artificial media, or make by mixing equal parts (by volume) of peat moss and perlite.
- Garden soil and "potting soil" should not be used because they will reduce or stop both drainage and aeration.
- In very large containers, use solid pieces of Styrofoam or empty soda cans to fill no more than one-third of the total volume of the container to save some money on potting mix.

Number of Plants

- About one plant for each eight to twelve inches of the diameter of the top of a round container. For example, if your container measures 18 inches across the widest part of the top, then use only one to two plants in that container.

Care and Maintenance

- Keep containers well-watered. Healthy and actively growing plants are more disease and insect-resistant than water-stressed or over-watered containers.
- Plants may need to be watered twice daily as they grow, toward the end of the summer.
- Frequently watering results in nutrient runoff. Regular fertilization will keep plants growing well. Use either slow-release fertilizer or a regular application of a soluble fertilizer. Follow the fertilizer label directions.

Sources:

https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/container_gardening_with_vegetables_herbs

<https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/container-gardening>

<https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/yard-garden/container-gardens-7-238/>

https://extension.illinois.edu/containergardening/choosing_material.cfm

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