

Vegetables - Growing in Containers

The trick to growing vegetables in containers is to marry the right conditions with the best varieties for each type.



Pots:

- Large containers give plants more root space and don't dry out as quickly (with the exception of unglazed terracotta pots). Because a minimum of 12 inches of soil depth — 18 inches is better — is required, pot sizes should be 3 or 5 gallons.
- Plastic pots may not be as pretty, but they are often the best choice. In fact, using a plastic pot inside a pottery or more decorative container adds an extra layer of insulation for heat and cold and slows water loss. The inner pot considerably cuts down the weight, making it easier to lift it out for planting or moving.

Soil, Sun + Watering:

- It is important to use good quality container mix — such as Sunshine, Pro Mix or Sea Soil blends.
- Add a slow-release organic fertilizer to the soil mix before planting.
- Locate containers where they will get a minimum of 5 to 6 hours of midday sun (6 to 8 hours is better).
- Keep containers well-watered; on warm days, water morning and evening.
- During extreme heat or drought conditions, plants have a harder time accessing nutrients in the soil. If the soil dries out, nutrients do not move from the soil, which can cause blossom end rot.
- It is critical for potted plants to receive an even water supply. Rarely is calcium lacking in the soil; however, irregular watering can create a deficiency.

Fertilizer:

- Soil in containers can be rapidly depleted of nutrients, so plants need to be fed. Most summer vegetables are heavy feeders and require weekly or biweekly fertilization to thrive.
- At a minimum, apply soluble fertilizer at midseason when fruiting or flowering begins to form vegetables or halfway through the growing season listed on the seed packet or plant label for leaf or root vegetables.
- A fertilizer high in nitrogen (N) is a good choice for leafy vegetables grown in containers.

Seed Spacing:

- Vegetables (with the exception of mesclun mixes) need room to grow and breathe, so do not crowd them. Almost any vegetable can be grown in the right size containers; some take more expertise than others. West Coast Seeds place a container icon on seed packets of species that do well when container grown.

Vegetables - Growing in Containers

Vegetables that can be successfully grown in containers:

CARROTS grow best in soft, humus-rich, finely worked soil. Seeds can be direct sown by scattering them over the soil and covering lightly. Keep the surface moist until the seeds germinate. Thin to 1” apart and later to 2” apart. ‘Little Fingers’ is a superb baby-type (3” long) carrot with a deep orange color developed in France for canning and pickling. ‘Baby Babette’ yields French Nantes hybrid finger carrots featuring an even cylindrical shape. They are bred for early color, high yields and delicious taste. Petite, ball-shaped beauties, ‘Round Romeo’ have smooth-skinned orange flesh that needs no peeling. Perfect for containers because they don't need deeply prepared soil like other carrot root crops, they are easy to grow and perform well for both spring and fall planting.

CORN ‘On Deck’ variety can be direct sown after the last frost, although for best germination results, make sure that soil temperature is above 55°F prior to planting. This Supersweet (Sh2) bicolor variety grows 4’ to 5’ tall and produces 2 to 3 ears (7” to 8” long) per stalk. Plant 9 seeds per 24” container and get ready to harvest in about 2 months. Along with tomatoes, corn is one of the heaviest nitrogen consumers, so be sure add slow-release fertilizer to the soil before planting and then use quick-release fertilizer to the soil every three to four weeks to provide consistent nutrients.

CUCUMBERS One of the best container varieties ‘Patio Snacker’, grows only 65 to 75 cm (25” to 30”) yet produces full-sized cucumbers that are ready to harvest in 50 to 55 days. ‘Bush Pickle’ is another great small growing variety, averaging 76 cm (2.5’) tall and wide with tasty 12 cm (5”) fruits. All cucumbers need to be kept moist to ensure a sweet flavour.

GREEN BEANS All-American Selections award winner, ‘Mascotte’ is one of the first green bean varieties bred specifically for growing in pots. It needs some support but grows only 26 to 60 cm (10” to 24”) tall and yields delicious 13 to 15 cm (5” to 6”) beans in 50 days. Plants are highly resistant to Bean common mosaic virus (BCMV), anthracnose and halo blight.

A French filet type green bean with a lovely flavour, ‘Ferrari’ produces slim, stringless, round pods (13cm/5”) in 55 days on compact plants. This variety has good potential for early starting under cloche protection. These bush bean seeds are resistant to Anthracnose and bean common mosaic BCMV and tolerant to cucumber mosaic virus.

When growing pole beans, direct sow seeds 3” apart around the base of an obelisk or other support. Bush beans take up more horizontal space than pole beans. Use an inoculant for best results.

LETTUCES are good candidates for container gardening because the outer leaves can be harvested while the core continues to grow. Simply Salad™ City Garden Mix offers pre-blended red and green leaf lettuces in multi-seed pellets. The line’s Alfresco option offers a slightly more bitter flavour profile with the inclusion of arugula, endive and radicchio. The Global Gourmet mix combines red and green leaf lettuces with Asian greens. Two smaller, very productive romaine varieties suitable for pots are ‘Starhawk’ and ‘Tiny Tower’. West Coast Seeds’ Fast and Furious Blend Organic Lettuce, which matures in 30 to 45 days, grows well in patio containers.

Vegetables - Growing in Containers

PEAS can be direct sown 2” apart but may need support as they grow. Rectangular planters work well and twiggy branches can be used for a natural look. Short varieties, such as ‘Sugar Ann’ snap peas don’t need trellising. Their bushy plants produce crisp, tasty 2” pods in 56 days and have excellent resistance to pea enation virus and powdery mildew.

PEPPERS Both sweet and hot peppers are very container friendly but require lots of heat (i.e. sun). Red and yellow ‘Mini Bells’ produce fruits that are about half the size of the traditional bell peppers but just as flavourful. As well, sweet banana and sweet cherry pepper varieties, with their smaller fruits, also perform well in containers.

When it comes to hot peppers, jalapeños are popular because of their medium hotness. Long thin cayenne peppers are about six times hotter than jalapeños on the Scoville Scale, which measures hotness. An excellent variety is ‘Basket of Fire’, which produces loads of ornamental-looking fruits with wonderful medium heat. ‘Loco’ and ‘Chenzo’ are two other container varieties with attractive medium-hot small fruits that are great for salads and chili dishes.

RADISHES are ideally suited for container growing. The seeds of these flavorful, fast-growing vegetables can be planted early as they are cool season vegetables. Take a break during the heat of summer, and then plant another crop of radishes when temperatures drop in autumn.

White radishes are a little milder than the red skinned ones, with less of that sharp heat. The ‘Icicle Short Top’ variety produces well in containers but requires deep, freely draining pots. Sow from early spring to the middle of May and plan to sow again in September for a fall harvest crop. The tops on this cylindrical, pure white radish only reach 11 cm (4½”), while the roots keep their fine texture and eating quality up to 15 cm (6”) long.

TOMATOES like a sunny spot and can easily be grown successfully in containers. Not only are cherry tomatoes, such as ‘Tumbler’ and ‘Tumbling Tom’, productive and easy to grow, these varieties cascade over the edge of their containers and don’t require a trellis. Two yellow cherry tomato varieties — ‘Sun Sugar’ and ‘Sun Gold’— deliver amazing sweet flavour when grown in containers but need a secure trellis for support. The bush form of ‘Early Girl’, which has good flavour, matures early and is productive all season, but also requires a secure trellis to support its upright growth. At about 2 weeks after planting, begin watering weekly with a soluble fertilizer. Until the plants begin flowering, you can use a balanced fertilizer with a 1-1-1 ratio such as 20-20-20. Once flowering, change over to a high potassium fertilizer. Most fertilizers blended for tomatoes fit this description.

ZUCCHINI usually requires a lot of space, but certain varieties thrive in containers. Bush varieties send up leaves from a single point rather than producing sprawling vines, while patio varieties have been specially bred to remain small enough to grow in a container. ‘Patio Star’ produces loads of tasty fruits on very compact, beautiful plants after 50 days. Other compact varieties include ‘Silver Bush’, ‘Buckingham Patio’, ‘Raven’ and ‘Spacemiser’.

Vegetables - Growing in Containers

References:

- <https://vancouver.sun.com/homes/gardening/brian-minter-add-flavour-to-your-patio-with-vegetables-in-containers>
- <https://www.bcliving.ca/container-vegetable-garden>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/container-gardening-vegetables-and-fruits-to-start-growing-now-1.3015640>
- <https://www.stokeseeds.com/ca/simply-salad-city-garden-mix-lettuce-mix-pelleted-p185y-group>
- <https://www.westcoastseeds.com/products/alfresco>
- <https://www.westcoastseeds.com/products/fast-and-furious-blend-organic>
- <https://www.planetnatural.com/fertilizing-potted-plants/>
- <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/should-fertilize-vegetable-garden-41648.html>
- <https://extension.psu.edu/container-grown-tomatoes>
- <https://www.burpee.com/vegetables/corn/corn-on-deck-hybrid-prod003168.html>
- <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/fertilize-vegetables-containers-32119.html>
- <https://puyallup.wsu.edu/lcs/>
- <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/403/2015/03/epsom-salts.pdf>
- <https://www.westcoastseeds.com/products/icicle-short-top>
- <https://www.westcoastseeds.com/products/sugar-ann>
- <https://www.reneesgarden.com/products/carrot-round-romeo>
- <http://www.thegrowshopllc.com/carrot-french-baby-babette/>
- <https://www.rareseeds.com/store/vegetables/carrots/little-finger-carrot>
- <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/zucchini-varieties-containers-70235.html>
- <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/plant-radishes-containers-53685.html>
- Dig This Best Vegetables for Container Gardening handout

- Created by Julie Cohen for VMGA 2020