

Benefits of Container Gardening

If you're not convinced about growing in pots and containers, here's a list of reasons why you should get started right now no matter where you live:

- **Versatile:** Container gardens allow you to grow on a balcony, patio, courtyard, indoors on windowsills or rooms with adequate light, the deck of a boat, or rooftop.
- **More variety:** You can grow plants that may not be suitable to grow in your garden soil and grow plants next to each other even though they may have different soil needs.
- **Accessibility:** Growing plants in containers makes gardening accessible to almost anyone including children, those with limited mobility and the elderly.
- **No weeding:** Due to the small surface area, it's unlikely weed seeds will find their way into pots.
- **Mobility:** Plants in pots can easily be moved to suit your needs or to a more suitable sunny or shady location during the day.
- **Flexibility:** Rearrange plants to suit the season or your personal taste.

Soil

You can use potting soil or straight compost.

Compost is beneficial for retaining water and Nutrients.

Peat Moss based potting soil has a neutral Ph, dries out fast.

Coconut Coir is natural waste, beneficial for water retention and drainage.

You can add perlite to assist with drainage

Top dressing with a natural mulch will add organic matter and also keeps roots cool.

Fertilizer

Your potting soil isn't going to cut it when it comes to feeding your plants, you need a fertilizer to make sure that all season long they are fed and are able to grow healthy. While there are plenty of conventional fertilizers I think that one of the best parts of growing your own food is the control you have over what chemicals your food is exposed to.

So when it comes to choosing a fertilizer I would look for an organic option from your local nursery that you know will be both healthy for your plants and your body.

There are many types of fertilizer but typically it is good to use a slow release organic fertilizer and mix it according to the fertilizer package directions into your potting soil.

Water soluble gives the gardener the most control

The soil used most often for containers is a soil-less mix which contains very few, if any, nutrients. It is therefore important to use a fertilizer that contains micro-nutrients. The actual amounts of these is not that important, and most commercial products that contain micro-nutrients will provide them in acceptable amounts.

3-1-2 N-P-K ratio for container garden fertilizer

1x Month May- September

Seaweed Fertilizer is Nutrient Rich, Easily absorbed by plants, and improves the soil.

Sun/Drainage

Understand Your Sun Exposure

You can grow healthy plants in lots of sun and in little sun, the important part is just knowing what your plants need and how much direct sun your container garden space gets throughout the day. This is another great part about container gardening because you can move your containers around as needed...just keep in mind that containers can still get pretty heavy so I always recommend studying the sun before you go ahead and fill all your containers.

Don't Underestimate Proper Watering And Drainage

Container gardens need to be watered frequently, especially during the hot summer months. Because they are above ground the containers can have a hard time holding moisture and it is important to make sure that your soil remains damp.

You can tell that your plants really need watering if the soil is pulling away from the side of the pot. Similarly, too much water can drown the roots of your plants causing them to die so make sure you don't overwater your plants and ensure that there are holes in the bottom of all your pots to allow for proper drainage.

The general rule of thumb when it comes to watering your plants is to stick your index finger into the soil to the knuckle. If it feels damp you can wait to water, if it feel very wet it has been overwatered, and if it feels dry it needs to be watered. Soon you will begin to understand how much water your plants need and wont need to do this everyday.

Rocks: There is a pervasive myth that putting gravel in the bottom of containers helps drainage. It doesn't; it actually encourages the soil to soak up water and stay wet. Avoid gravel.

Good potting Soil and appropriate drainage holes are your best bet to proper drainage (if you are losing soil through your drainage holes, cover them in screening)

Plants

Almost any vegetable that will grow in a typical backyard garden will also do well as a container-grown plant.

Containers

The size of the containers you use will be dictated by the kind of plants you want to grow. Remember that when it comes to container gardening the container you plant in is the only home for this plant.

If you want your plants to grow healthy and provide an abundance of fruit then you have to make sure the container you plant them in is large enough.

- Terra Cotta Containers: Terra cotta containers are some of my favorite to plant in. Frost sensitive. They can be more expensive and heavier to move and are breakable. They also tend to get very hot and can bake easily in the sun so they may require more frequent watering.
- Plastic: Plastic is going to be the cheapest option and is the lightest to move around. My only issue with plastic containers is that they are viewed as disposable so if you choose to purchase them for your garden make sure you use them year after year.
- Wood: Wooden containers, especially raised bed containers are beautiful in gardens. These planters are an excellent option for plants that need more room.
- Cement: Cement planters are expensive but incredibly durable. They are heavy though, especially once dirt has been added into them so these are **better to choose for more permanent containers that you don't plan to move around.**
- Grow Bags: Light weight, good for plants that need to be oved Indoors. Dry quickly use compost.

Pest Prevention

Squirrels and chipmunks love to dig in pots! Adding steel wool to mulch will keep little paws away. Red Pepper Flakes will also repel these critters.

Don't reuse potting mix.

To avoid pests in container gardens, don't reuse potting soil, especially if it contained plants that were affected by fungus or bacteria. Even if the soil looks fine, it can be contaminated by disease and may also have insect eggs or larvae that can't be seen. Pitch the soil or throw it in your compost.

Clean your containers.

Clean containers helps prevent container garden problems. At the start of each new planting season, scrub your pots and containers in liquid detergent and water. For pots that may have been subjected to garden pests and disease, soak them in a solution of one part household bleach to ten parts water for about an hour. Rinse them thoroughly and allow them to air dry before planting in them.

Inspect regularly.

Regular plant inspections help head off container garden problems. When you water, look at both sides of a few leaves – check the soil for anything that has burrowed in there also.