

# Growing Vegetables in Containers

Container gardening is the ideal solution for gardeners with limited space, allowing you to grow vegetables in window boxes, hanging baskets, on balconies, patio, decks, and doorsteps.

Containers can give you an instant garden without the labor of tilling and weeding. They are also portable, allowing you to move them around for aesthetic reasons or to ideal light conditions.

Technically, you could grow just about anything in a container it is large enough and kept moist. Though, dwarf or compact plants and plants with shallow roots are especially well suited. Some plants may need a little extra TLC to do well in containers if they require a lot of nutrients to complete their full life cycle, have an extensive root system, or are tall and can topple over to easily in wind.

Container types – Avoid containers that are less than 6” deep. They will dry out too fast and plants may become root bound if the container is too small. Types of containers include: terra cotta, glazed ceramic, plastic, foam (faux terra cotta/stone), wire or metal hanging baskets with sphagnum moss, and wood whiskey barrels (line with a plastic garbage bag with the bottom cut off to retain moisture if you are in a hot, dry climate).

Drainage - Make sure your container has adequate drainage. It should have at least one drainage hole in the bottom. You can prevent soil from falling out by laying a small piece of screen, a coffee filter, or some rocks over the hole, but don't completely plug the hole.

Soil – Most commercial potting soils are fine for containers, but consider amending them with 50% compost. Since, they are usually very lightweight and contain a lot of peat, vermiculite, or perlite that don't retain moisture well, the additional organic matter in the compost will help your plantings stay moist for a longer period.

Fertilizer – Use a balanced fertilizer at the manufacturer's recommended application rate. But, you may need to fertilize more frequently, because nutrients are lost out of the bottom of the container with each watering.

Variety choices – Compact plants and plants with shallow roots are most suited for containers. Pole varieties of beans or tomatoes will need some sort of support for climbing. You can attach a trellis or put these containers next to a fence.

Thinning – Following spacing recommendations on seed packets is CRITICAL when growing in containers. Since the roots are in a confined area, roots from multiple plants will compete with each other. If there is too much competition for moisture and nutrients, none will thrive and you will be disappointed with the results. (See chart below for some tips on how many plants can grow in a container.)

Sunlight – Most fruiting vegetables need a minimum of 6-8 hours of direct sunlight to thrive and produce well. Leafy greens and root vegetables can tolerate partial shade better, requiring a minimum of 3-6 hours of direct sunlight or dappled sunlight for most of the day.

Watering – during the hottest part of summer, containers may need watered twice a day to keep from drying out. When vegetables dry out, they stop growing. A plant that has wilted may never fully recover. If you work during the day, water once in the morning and again when you get home during the hottest part of summer. Consider the convenience of using self-watering planters, especially if you are in a very hot, dry climate or will be leaving town for a few days.

Wind – If you live in a windy area, it's very important to anchor your containers, especially if they are lightweight plastic or foam. Put them in a protected area or weigh down the bottom of the container with bricks or rocks. The taller the plants get and the dryer the soil, the more likely they are to blow away on a gusty day.

*If you are new to gardening and have never grown vegetables in containers before, we recommend starting with tomatoes and lettuce. (There is NOTHING in the grocery store comparable to the flavor of a homegrown tomato, and lettuce is so incredibly easy-to-grow, everyone should have at least one container of each at home!)*

## Container Recommendations for Vegetables

Vegetable	Minimum Container Size	Notes
Amaranth Edible Red Leaf	12" diameter	1 plant per container. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Artichoke	36" wide x 24" deep	1 plant per container. Try using large whiskey barrels. Remember-artichokes do not produce until the 2 <sup>nd</sup> year. If you are in a cold climate, they may not over winter in a container.
Arugula	1-2 gallon	Thin to 6" apart. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Bean Bush	2 gallon	1 plant per container or thin to 4"-6" apart in larger containers. Fun to grow in plastic lined baskets (with drainage).
Bean Fava	5 gallon	Thin to 3-5 plants. Trellis support may be necessary, especially if not in full sun.
Bean Pole	2 gallon w/support	1 plant per container or thin to 4" to 6" apart. Provide a

		cage, trellis, or pole for support.
Beet	2 gallon (minimum 6"-12 deep)	Thin to at least 3" apart. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Bitter Melon	5 gallon	Thin to 6"-8" apart.
Bok Choy	1-2 gallon	Thin to 6" apart.
Broccoli	5 gallon	1 plant per container. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Broccoli Raab	2 gallon	Thin to 4" to 6" apart. Monitor daily. Plants may flower faster in a container. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Brussels Sprouts	2 gallon	1 plant per container
Cabbage Chinese	2 gallon	1 plant per container.
Cabbage	5 gallon	1 plant per container.
Carrot	2 gallon (minimum 6"-12 deep)	Shallow roots work best: Tonda di Parigi, Baby Little Fingers. Thin to 2" apart. If trying longer carrots, choose container that is at least 2 x as long as the roots.
Cauliflower	5 gallon	1 plant per container. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Celery	5 gallon	Thin to 6" apart.
Collards	12" deep	<b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Corn	3' wide x 1' deep	3 plants per container for pollination. Not recommended. You may get tall plants, but they are such heavy feeders, it is hard to get them to produce.
Cucumber	5 gallon	1 plant per container. Never let them dry out or fruit may get bitter. Recommended variety – Spacemaster.
Edamame	2-3 gallon	1 plant per container
Eggplant	5 gallon	1 plant per container
Endive	8" wide x 6-10" deep (1 gallon minimum)	1 plant per container (crowded plants will bolt) <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Escarole	8" wide x 6-10" deep (1 gallon minimum)	1 plant per container (crowded plants will bolt) <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Gourd	5 gallon	1 plant per container
Kale	8" wide x 8" deep	Easy in containers. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Kohlrabi	5 gallon	1-3 plants per container
Leek	10"-12" deep	Thin to a minimum of 4" apart. Crowded leeks stay

		small.
Lettuce	8" wide x 6-10" deep (1 gallon minimum)	Easy! Leaf types are especially suited to containers. Direct seed or transplant. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Mache	Any size	<b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Mesclun	1-2 gallon	Very pretty in containers! <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Micro Greens	Any size	<b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Melon	5-10 gallon	1 plant per container
Muskmelon	5-10 gallon	1 plant per container
Mustard	8"-12" deep	Thin to 6" apart. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Okra	5 gallon	1 plant per container
Onion Bunching	10"-12" deep	Thin to 2" apart <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Onion Bulbing	---	Not recommended.
Parsnip	---	Not recommended.
Peas	12" wide x 12" deep	Use inoculant. Harvest may be up to 2 weeks earlier than in the ground.
Peppers	2-5 gallon	1 plant per container
Pumpkins	5 gallons / 2-3' deep	Miniature varieties do best: Jack Be Little, Little October. May use trellis and grow vertically. Whiskey barrel size for a larger pumpkin plant.
Radicchio	8" wide x 6-8" deep	1 plant per container
Radishes	2 gallon	Thin to at least 1" apart. (Crowded or heat-stressed radishes will bolt.) <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Spinach	1 gallon	1-3 plants per container. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Squash Summer	5 gallon / 2' deep	1-2 plants per container
Squash Winter	5 gallon (or larger)	Whiskey barrel size. 1 plant per container
Swiss Chard	5 gallon	Pretty ornamental edible! 3-5 plants per container. <b>*Tolerates partial shade.</b>
Tomatillo	5 gallon	1 plant per container
Tomato, Bush (Determinate)	5 gallon	1 plant per container
Tomato, Pole (Indeterminate)	5 gallon	1 plant per container, use cage or stakes for support
Tomato, Dwarf (Cherry)	2-3 gallon	1 plant per container. Support may be required or try growing in a hanging basket, letting vines dangle
Turnip	5 gallon	3-4 plants per container
Watermelon	---	Not recommended
Wheatgrass	Any size	<b>*Tolerates partial shade</b> (or grow indoors).