

## Potted or Container Vegetable Gardening Tips For Beginners



Oregon Tomatoes in a Container

You don't really need a plot of land in front of your house to enjoy the pleasure of vegetable gardening. You can start a potted vegetable garden quite conveniently at any location in your house that has access to direct sun. Container vegetable gardening is becoming an extremely practical option with the advent of dwarf and bush varieties for almost all vegetables.

These dwarf varieties produce high yields while consuming low ground space. These varieties are designed to occupy a small foot print and hence lend themselves easily as potted plants. Even if you do have a plot, you should consider container gardening merely because it will save up on space and help you increase your harvest.

### What are the benefits of container vegetable gardening

There are some obvious benefits to growing vegetables in containers and then there also some not so obvious benefits. Let's have a look at all the advantages you get to reap when you grow vegetables in pots.

1. Allows mobility, if there is too much heat or cold you can always move your potted plants to a more suitable location inside your house.
2. You have more control on the soil conditions. The use of soil mix and fertilizers will allow you to provide a nutrient rich environment for your potted plants.
3. When you grow vegetables in pots you get to use up the wasted space on a patio, deck or a terrace.

4. Elderly people who cannot go about doing heavy gardening will enjoy the convenience of a potted vegetable garden.
5. You can even use your attic or closet as the space for container vegetable gardening. Several plants like lettuce, parsley, carrots, beets and chives grow easily in the presence of artificial lights.

The most important benefits is that you get to save up on space and you are only limited by imagination while deciding the space in your house and veranda that can be used up to grow vegetables in pots.

### **Which vegetables are best suited for a potted vegetable garden**

With the exception of a few space heavy vegetables like corn & pumpkin, almost all types of vegetables can be grown as potted plants. Just be sure to buy the dwarf varieties in each vegetable. A few examples of dwarf varieties available in each vegetable are given below.

- Beets - Little Egypt, Early red ball
- Brussels sprouts - Jade cross
- Carrot - Short & sweet, Tiny sweet
- Cucumber - Patio pik, Pot luck, Spacemaster, Bush pickle
- Lettuce - Salad bowl, Bibb, Buttercrunch
- Onion - White sweet Spanish and Yellow sweet Spanish
- Pepper - Sweet banana, Long red cayenne, Jalapenno, Apply red cherry
- Spinach - Dark green bloomsdale
- Tomatoes - Tiny tim, Toy boy, Small fry, Spring giant, Pixie
- Eggplant - Slim jim, Black beauty
- Snap Beans - Tender crop, Bush romano
- Green Beans - Kentucky wonder, Blue lake
- Radish - Icicle, Cherry Belle
- Cabbages - Red ace, Dwarf modern
- Broccoli - green comet
- Squash - Gold Rush, Scallopini

As you can see there is no shortage of vegetable you can try in your potted vegetable garden. Thanks to all the vegetable breeders out there for coming up with these dwarf varieties that have made container vegetable gardening a practical as well as productive venture.

### **How should I grow potted tomatoes?**



Support for tomato plants

Tomatoes and beans prove to be a special case when it comes to a potted vegetable garden. These plants grow up with a weak or slender stem and need to be supported so they don't collapse on themselves. You should consider purchasing the compact varieties in tomatoes but you might still want to make arrangements to provide some external support for their growth.

The most commonly used supports in for potted tomatoes and beans are as below

1. A wire cage
2. A steel, wooden or plastic pole

If you go in for the compact varieties of tomatoes you would not need to employ a wire cage. If you see the stem of your tomato plant stooping to one side, you should place a stout support like a steel pole alongside the plant and tie the stem to the support with a wire.

Tomatoes also have deep root system so you should consider growing them in a 5 gallon container.

### **What soil should I use to grow vegetables in pots**

There is no doubt about the fact that "synthetic soils" are better suited for container vegetable gardening than the use of garden soil. You can prepare a synthetic soil mix at home using a few of the below ingredients.

1. Peat moss
2. Perlite
3. Vermiculite (horticultural grade)
4. Saw dust
5. Sifted compost
6. Limestone
7. Superphosphate and garden fertilizer

You can purchase synthetic soils directly from any garden center or prepare a few bushels of it at home. Here is a simple procedure to make 2 bushels of potting mix that can be employed at home.

## Procedure to make a potting mix

Take one bushel of shredded sphagnum peat moss and mix it with one bushel of Vermiculite. Add 1 cup (10 tablespoons) of limestone to this mix. You should then mix in a cup of superphosphate (0-20-0) and a cup of granular fertilizer (5-10-5 or 5-10-10). Moisten this mixture with water and let it store for a week before using it.

## What are the container specifications for vegetable gardening

You are only restricted by imagination when it comes to choosing a container for potted plants. A few examples of materials that can be used as containers are - drums, tubs, wooden boxes, large food cans, bushel baskets, pails, buckets, window planters, flower pots etc.

A few tips on preparing the container for vegetable planting are as below.

1. Ensure proper drainage facility. Poke some holes in the bottom and on the sides (1/2 inch from the bottom) to improve drainage of excess water.
2. Avoid using dark colored containers, especially black colored ones, as they tend to absorb heat and damage the root system. You can paint the containers with a light color such as cream or white.
3. The container size should vary according to the type of vegetable you are growing. For examples, tomatoes would require a 5 gallon container per plant while Parsley requires a 1/2 gallon container.
4. Add one inch of coarse gravel at the bottom of the container to improve the drainage.

You will find a 5 gallon container to be most suitable for different types of vegetables. You can use the below guideline for choosing the container size with respect to the vegetable you plan on growing.

The approximation used here is: 1 gallon = 8 inches deep.

- Cabbage - 1 gallon (1 plant)
- Beets - 2 gallon (plant them 2 to 3 inches apart)
- Leaf lettuce - 1 gallon (4-6 plants)
- Carrots - 2 gallon
- Cucumber - 1 gallon (2 plants)
- Pepper - 2 gallon
- Tomatoes - 3 gallon or 5 gallon (depending on the variety)

Get creative with the use of waste boxes as containers. Potted plants can be grown in something as simple as a milk carton. Container vegetable gardening can turn into a fun project for your kids if you get them involved in designing the pots. With experience you will get better with improving your skills so your potted vegetable garden yields more for the given space. So go ahead and grow vegetables in pots to enjoy some home-grown fresh vegetables in your daily cooking.