

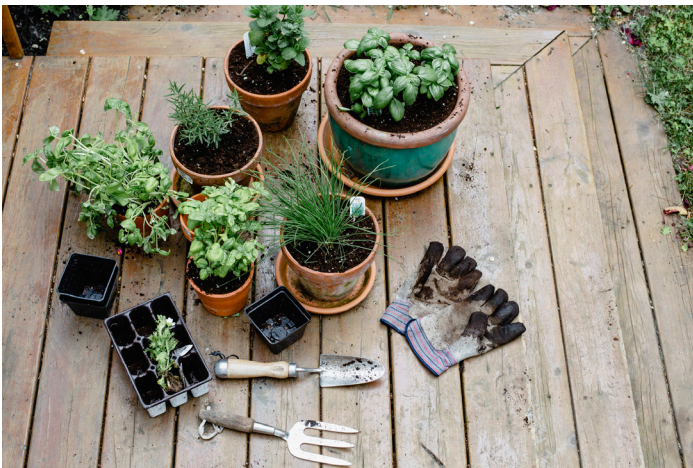
Container Gardening 101

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Do you want to grow your own produce but have limited space outside, poor, contaminated soil, or limited mobility? An easy solution is container gardening. Containers can go on an inside window sill, a sunny spot on your counter or on a patio or balcony outside. There are many options for growing at home.

Step 1: Decide what you would like to grow.

This is a critical step because it will determine your soil type, fertilizer and sun requirements, temperature, and water needs. To help make this decision, consider what you enjoy cooking with and eating frequently. Options of plant types include vegetables, herbs, and micro greens. Another factor that will determine what you will grow is how much space you have available.



Step 2: Choose the proper container.

How big will the plants get? This will determine how big of a container you will need and how many plants will fit in each container. What you decide to grow will affect your choice of container, based on the amount of space the plants need to grow. Both the depth and width of the container are important things to consider. Some plants have fibrous root systems, while others have tap roots,

which will affect how much space each plant will need. For example, cabbage has shallow fibrous roots and does not need as much soil space to grow compared to squash, which has a deep tap root.

- Pick a container that has holes or that you can easily make some holes in.
- Consider the material of the container you choose. There are many options for container types, including: terra cotta, plastic, poly-stone, wood, and even metal (make sure they are lead free). Different materials will have different costs, and some can affect the growing



- plants. Terra cotta pots, for example, tend to lose moisture quickly, while black plastic pots absorb heat, which may damage the plant's roots.
- You may want to consider additional container features. For example, hanging baskets are great for vining plants like strawberries. Choose a container with a water reservoir and reduce time spent watering. Or choose a container with wheels to help with mobility.
- Don't be afraid to get creative. Take a few objects you may have laying around in the garage to repurpose into containers. Use an old cooler, those extra Easter baskets, or even the old desk that is just collecting dust in the attic— just be sure to clean it well before planting. Lots of great ideas can be found on the internet.

Step 3: Pick a good growing medium.

The characteristics of a good growing medium include being light and easy for the delicate roots to penetrate, holding water well, being free of infectious diseases, and containing nutrients but not be overly rich, as in too much fertilizer or compost.

Two common choices are potting soil and garden soil. Which is for you? Potting soil is lighter and already contains plant nutrients or fertilizer. Potting soil is usually sterile, which means it is free from bugs, weeds, bacteria, and parasites. It is usually made of a mix of ingredients like perlite, sand, peat moss, and compost.

Garden soil is also known by another name, top soil. It is not considered sterile but can be organic. It weighs much more than potting mix and has a higher clay content, which leads to more water holding capacity. In most cases, gardening soil will need the application of fertilizer. For these reasons, gardening soil isn't the recommended substrate for container gardening.

Step 4: Find the optimum placement.

Placing your pot in the right location is a major key to success. Containers are easily moved, so if the first spot chosen doesn't work out, you can always move it and try again. Most vegetables prefer full sun, whereas some herbs or microgreens may do well with only partial sun. Keep in mind your access to water. Containers in a sheltered place will not get rain. On hot summer days, it may be necessary to water twice a day— once in the morning and again in

the evening. Refer to your plant tag or seed package to determine how much sunlight and water each plant needs. Be attentive to keeping pests at bay. Before you know it, your plants will produce fruits/vegetables.



Step 5: Make a budget.

Shop around to see what the average cost for seeds or plugs are. Compare prices for potting soil, fertilizer, and containers. Growing from seed is the less expensive option if your budget is tight. Start seeds indoors in a sunny spot. If your sunny spot inside is large enough, it may be best to start the seeds in the container you plan to grow them in, which will save on material costs.

Happy planting!

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