

# Container Vegetable Gardening for Small Spaces



Growing vegetable in containers can be for small spaces, temporary residence, moveable gardens, exterior design, accent gardens, able gardening for limited mobility of the gardener, better nutrition or just for fun!

These days it is important to know where our food comes from and have an available food source close by. What better way to have your own healthy food than to grow it ourselves!

Even in small or temporary space, you can grow your own food in containers of all sizes and shapes! As long as you consider the needs of each plant for root growth, sunlight, food, water and soil needs, you could be eating from your containers in just a few weeks!

1. Find a space that receives at least 8 hours of full sunlight each day.
2. Find suitable containers from around your home, garage, shed, or even the side of the road...
  - a. Buckets with holes in the bottoms
  - b. Rubbermaid type totes with drainage holes in the bottom
  - c. Plastic, pottery or ceramic pots and containers
3. Decide on the food you want to grow
4. Learn the needs of each food
5. Plan the soil for the containers for the plants that will grow there:
  - a. Potting soil and compost
  - b. Potting soil, compost and sand
  - c. Mostly sand, and compost
  - d. Extra lime for some vegetables
  - e. Extra composted manures for others
6. Match up the containers with the needs of the plants
  - a. Root depth,

- b. Space to spread out
- c. Deep enough for a trellis, or way to connect a trellis to is
- 7. Arrange the containers in their positions for growing
- 8. Add moistened soil to the proper containers
  - a. If the soil is not moistened before the plants go in, the soil will take the water before the plants have a chance
- 9. Water the plants before planting
  - a. Soak larger seeds for a few hours before planting to help them germinate sooner
- 10. Plant the plants, or seeds, with enough space between them for them to grow to maturity
  - a. The deeper the soil, the better the root system and better food production.
- 11. Collect rain water to water your plants, or leave your water containers out, at least overnight, to let the chlorine dissipate from it.**
  - a. Tap water has chlorine in it to kill harmful bacteria in the water pipes.
  - b. Chlorine will also kill beneficial bacteria in the soil
- 12. Water the plants well to give them a good start
- 13. Water the plants or seeds daily for two weeks so they will establish their roots in the soil.
- 14. After two weeks, water as needed
  - a. For instance, cucumbers need daily, even watering; tomatoes need deep watering twice a week.
  - b. Learn about each vegetable needs
  - c. Plants in containers need more watering and care than those in framed raised beds or in the ground because of heating of the container sides.
- 15. Each plant will be ready for harvesting in its own time and continue with good care.
- 16. Enjoy your harvest and plan to plant again
  - a. Cold crops April through June and August through October
  - b. Winter growing, April through April and October to April
  - c. Warm weather crops May through September

### **3 option to begin a container vegetable garden:**

- A “**shade**” garden started with seeds of lettuce, spinach and radishes will grow quickly.
  - Start with moistened potting soil and some compost mixed in
  - Let the soil rest, at least overnight
  - Plant your seeds and cover lightly with soil.
  - Water lightly twice a day for two weeks,
  - Thin the plantings when they sprout to give them space,
  - Water in the mornings,
  - Harvest the larger greens from the outside of the clump and let the inner greens continue to grow through September, or later.
  - Radishes are ready when you see the red base emerge from the soil.
- A **sunny** area garden will require planting mature plants and watering well every morning. Transplanting at this time of year will confuse the plants and divide its energy between growing food, developing roots and getting adjusted to a new environment. Production will be slow.

- Start with moistened potting soil and some compost mixed in
  - Let the soil rest, at least overnight
  - Water your plants well *before* planting
  - Water your plants well *after* they are planted
  - Prune back nonproducing foliage of tomatoes and damaged plants
  - Water daily to help the roots to take hold
  - Cut back cucumber and quash vines to 4-6 flowers
  - Harvest often, into September
- Planning ahead to a “**cold weather**” garden may be the best option, as the planning, construction and planting begin now and success is more guaranteed for a good harvest in the fall and through the winter!
    - Planting is delayed to an easier time to tend the garden
      - More rain, less watering
      - Cooler temperatures, more comfortable
    - Less stress on your timeline
      - More pleasant to work without time pressure
    - Planning for success, rather than pressure to produce
    - Start with moistened potting soil and some compost mixed in
    - Mulch with straw or leaves
    - The containers and soil will be ready for planting
      - Having had a longer time to rest the soil
    - ***A larger variety of plants and seeds can be planted in August***
      - in multiple containers for a variety of soils
      - Lettuce, spinach, radishes
        - Plant your seeds and cover lightly with soil.
        - Water lightly twice a day for two weeks,
        - Thin the plantings when they sprout to give them space,
        - Water in the mornings,
        - Harvest the larger greens from the outside of the clump and let the inner greens continue to grow through September, or later.
        - Radishes are ready when you see the red base emerge from the soil.
        - The above may be repeated indoors in the winter, near a window
      - Sugar snap peas
        - Container with a trellis
        - Start with moistened potting soil and some compost mixed in
        - Water the soil with a solution of water and pulverized limestone
        - Soak seeds overnight, but not longer
        - Water lightly twice a day for two weeks
          - Will produce in mid-September through October or November
      - Kale, broccoli and Brussels Sprouts
        - Best to start with plants to transplant to your containers
        - Deep soil with space for growth
        - Water lightly twice a day for two weeks,
        - Water as needed, at least every other day

- Keeping track of rain, so they don't drown
- Mulch with leaves
- Kale and Broccoli will start to produce edibles in 5 weeks.
  - **Broccoli** will be thin sprouts, not clumps
  - Harvest the larger leaves of **Kale** from the bottom of the stalk and allow to continue to produce through the winter
  - Brussels Sprouts will not be ready until after a hard frost, but then through the winter will continue to produce.
- Carrots and parsnips
  - Need sandy soil with compost added
  - Water the soil with a solution of water and pulverized limestone
  - Deep soil with space for growth
  - Plant by seed
  - Water lightly twice a day for two weeks,
  - Water as needed, at least every other day
  - Thin the sprouts to allow space for each other to grow
    - Eat the sprouts, or transplant
  - Harvest when base is seen in the soil
    - Or when they are large enough for your taste
    - Harvest only what you need
    - Leave more for another time
    - Flavor and crunch is best after the frost, or in the winter

Small space gardening is a satisfying way to grow food all year long and eat well, from your own containers! There is no reason to not grow food due to lack of space, just find some sun, containers and soil, then off you go! My first tomato plant was in a 5 gallon bucket on my back porch of my apartment on the third floor, overlooking an alley in Boston. I was hooked on growing food from that time to today. May your garden flourish as you have patience and creative fun with this healthy endeavor!