

How to grow veggies in containers

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QUESTION: I would love to grow my own vegetables this summer, but my yard is small and just not suitable for a garden. Is it possible to grow vegetables in containers?

ANSWER: If you live in an apartment, or just lack the space for in-ground gardening, you can enjoy all the benefits of raising fresh, homegrown vegetables using containers. Vegetables can be grown in almost anything, as long as you make sure the container is big enough to support the full-grown plant and provides adequate soil-holding capacity to accommodate the plant's root system. Some suggestions are barrels, galvanized bins, flower pots, window boxes, dishpans, or empty milk jugs. Make sure the container is clean and that it has a drainage hole in the bottom. Group them on patios, balconies or doorsteps to take advantage of a sunny spot.

Almost any vegetable can be grown in containers. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, rhubarb, artichokes, squash, green onions, carrots, lettuce and herbs are just a few. If you plant pole beans or cucumbers they will need a trellis to climb and more space. Check for vegetable varieties specifically geared toward container gardening.

Don't exclusively use garden soil to fill your containers as it is too heavy, but mix it in with a fairly lightweight potting soil mix and some compost. Or, you can make your own soil mix by using garden soil, compost, peat, and vermiculite.

When planting seeds, fill the container to within 1/2" of the top with slightly dampened soil mix. Sow seeds according to package directions. Gently water the soil or use a squirt bottle so seeds aren't disturbed. Label each



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Containers are a great way to grow veggies — and other plants — if you have limited space for in-ground gardening.

container with the name and variety of the vegetables and the planting date. Keep soil damp. When the seedlings display two or three leaves, thin them for proper spacing between plants.

If using transplants be sure and keep each plant at least one inch away from the side edge of the container so the roots don't get too hot, especially if the container is made of black plastic. Place them in the soil mix, and add more around the plants to within one inch of the top of the container. Press in lightly. Water thoroughly.

Vegetables require at least six hours of sunshine a day to thrive. Consider putting the container on a wheeled "dolly" (you can find these

at garden centers) so you can move the plant to a sunnier location should it become shaded by your roof or trees during the course of the day. These dollies are also handy during hot spells when plants need to be moved into the shade during the hottest part of the day.

Container plants dry out more quickly, so you may have to water them daily. They also require more fertilizer because the more frequent watering leaches minerals out of the soil. Start a feeding schedule two months after planting of a balanced (20-20-20) water-soluble fertilizer every two or three weeks. Keep the containers weed-free, and frequently check for insects and pests.



Peppers poking out of a gardening container.

With container gardening, anyone can reap the benefits and fun of growing their own vegetables.

Do you have a gardening

question? Please e-mail, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardeners Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-236-3052, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg.