

CONTAINER GARDENING



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Watering is very important in container gardening. The plants may not need watering every day but they will need to be checked that often. No set time can be specified between waterings since weather, container size, and other factors vary. Water when the top 1" of soil feels dry. The easiest way to fertilize is to use a time-release product such as Osmocote or a water soluble fertilizer such as Schultz or Miracle Gro.

Use lightweight potting soil, not soil from the garden. The soil should hold some moisture but be light enough to provide good air circulation to the roots. Lightweight soil will also reduce the weight of the containers so they are easier to move.

Choose a container which has good drainage. Contrary to popular belief, putting rocks in the bottom of a container does not help drainage. The pot should be heavy enough and proportioned so as to support a fully developed vegetable or flower, otherwise, wind could easily topple the plant. Clay pots have good drainage and air circulation but will need

more watering. Large clay pots will be very heavy. Plastic pots don't lose water as rapidly but they may get very hot. Stay away from dark colored containers in very hot situations. Wood containers are good if the wood preservative isn't toxic to plants. Whatever type of container you use, it should be at least 6"-8" deep.

Containerized vegetables need a minimum of six hours of good sun per day. Vegetables that do well in containers include:

- BUSH BEANS - Plant 4" apart. Beans like warmth and moisture.
- CARROTS - Plant 3" apart. Use very sandy soil. Ample water and fertilizer are needed. Use a container deep enough for the variety of carrot you select.
- CUCUMBERS - Each plant needs 12" of container space. Best results with bush variety. Very decorative.
- LETTUCE - Use loose leaf varieties. Choose a cool location. Light shade is okay.
- PEPPERS - Attractive foliage and pretty white flowers. Space 8" apart.
- RADISHES - Need cool temperatures and lots of sun. Space 2" apart.
- PATIO TOMATOES - Developed specifically for containers. Don't overwater or they will develop cracked fruit.

Most flowers work well in containers. Some of the best for sun include ageratum, alyssum, wax begonias, dwarf dahlias, geraniums, marigolds, nasturtiums, petunias, small varieties of snapdragons and salvia, mini roses, vinca, and zinnias. Several do well in partial shade including wax and tuberous begonias, impatiens, and coleus. Plants for deeper shade include impatiens, tuberous begonias, and caladiums. Combining flowers with greenery (vinca vine, sprengeri, spikes) gives containers a filled-out look. Use different colors (yellow marigold with white alyssum and blue petunias) or use a splash of one color (red geraniums). Whatever you choose, keep mature heights in mind so the total effect is in scale with the container. Pinch the flowers back periodically to keep them compact.

Don't overlook using perennials in containers. Although they won't survive the winter left in the container, they can be transplanted into the garden in the fall and covered with mulch after the ground has frozen. Hosta are especially attractive in partial shade containers and will add interesting texture and color.

Pests can be a problem in containers. Look especially for aphids, spider mites, and mealy bugs. Because the containers are relatively small, problems can be found quickly and controlled easily.

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