



How to Set Up a Container Garden: 3 Basic Steps

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A container garden is one of the best ways for people with limited space to grow a kitchen garden filled with fresh fruit, vegetables and herbs. You can grow a wide variety of plants in containers as long as you have enough sunshine, good soil and a suitably sized container.

It's also a great way to jazz up your front entry area. A few pots with colourful flowers or vibrant greenery will make any entryway more inviting.

These three basic steps are crucial to set up a container garden successfully.

What is the Best Location?

The first consideration is choosing the best location for your garden. It must have enough sunlight for the type of plants you want to grow. Some protection from wind may also be necessary, depending on what you will be growing.

Although many vegetables, herbs, and flowering plants need eight hours of sun, there are many that thrive in less direct sun. Not all plants require eight or more hours of sunlight, and if the only spot for growing your garden in containers has limited sun, then select plants that can thrive with less sunlight. There are many attractive decorative plants that do well in semi shade areas as well as ones that require full sun.

West or south facing balconies and patios are good locations, providing you have a nearby source of water. Because these areas receive more of the hotter afternoon sun, plants in pots will dry out more quickly.

Tips for Choosing the Best Containers

The second consideration is choosing the best possible containers. Ensure all plant pots and containers have good drainage. They should have a tray to collect any water that escapes through the drain holes if you're locating your plants on a balcony or patio so that excess water does not stain or cause problems.

Select containers that are large enough to accommodate the mature plants. They should be deep enough so that root vegetables have space to develop. Foliage and fruit plants, such as strawberries, won't need as much depth, but will require more surface area.

Think big – and avoid the mess and struggle trying to repot. A large mature plant in a too-small container will become root bound and dry out very quickly.

What Is The Best Kind Of Container?

The type of container you choose is also important. Plant nurseries and home improvement outlets carry a wide variety of pots, made from different materials and in varying shapes and sizes, so let's look at the pros and cons of each kind of material.

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Terra cotta containers:

Terra cotta is unglazed clay, and is porous. These containers may dry out quickly, so unless you like watering daily or have an automatic watering system set up, they are not a good choice. They are also very heavy compared to other types of containers, making them difficult to move once filled with soil. On the pro side, these pots are attractive, and come in a variety of sizes.

Glazed pots:

Most nurseries and home improvement outlets have a selection of glazed ceramic or clay pots – beautiful to look at, colourful and in every conceivable size. Unless you are concerned about attractiveness, these pots are best used for decorative planters rather than as containers for a kitchen garden. They are expensive, heavy and once in place, hard to move. Other container types may be a better choice for a kitchen garden.

Rot resistant wood containers:

Naturally rot-resistant woods are a good choice for kitchen garden containers. Some woods that are naturally resistant to rot are black locust, teak, redwood, cypress and western red cedar. While these natural woods add warmth and naturalness to any garden structure, they may be expensive.

Metal containers:

Metal containers may absorb heat from the sun, causing the soil to dry faster and plant roots to overheat if the container is small. However, metal is long lasting, can be attractive, and better used in a cooler climate. Large metal galvanized planters and tanks come in various sizes, and can hold many plants, making them great choices for a kitchen container garden. However, they have no bottoms, so are not suitable for patios or balconies.

Fabric containers:

One of the newest types of gardening containers are fabric, often referred to as [grow bags](#). Grow bags help your plants flourish and develop beautiful root networks with lots of healthy root tips. The sturdy non-woven fabric is breathable and permeable, preventing heat build-up, allowing soil to breathe. They are inexpensive, and come in a variety of sizes, from 3 gallon to 20 gallon, and can be reused for several years.

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What is the Best Soil?

Choosing the right soil for your containers can be overwhelming for new gardeners. There are a lot of choices in your local nursery or garden center, but it's not difficult to make the right choice.

Soil mixes for containers will be labelled as 'potting soil' or 'potting mix'. Never choose those labelled as 'raised bed soil' or 'garden soil' – they will not work well in containers, as they won't drain well and may harden into an impermeable mass in a container over time.

Potting soils should contain compost, peat moss, coco coir, vermiculite, and/or perlite. They are lightweight and airy, and will remain that way. Some have fertilizers included, or you can add it before you plant.

Good potting soil can be reused the next year – simply add some new compost and granular fertilizer to it for an extra boost of nutrition.

Gardener's Tip: To prevent soil and compost in containers from drying out, mix in water-retaining granules before you plant up the containers.

Once you've chosen the most suitable containers for your kitchen garden, have filled them with rich soil, and the plants are growing vigorously, sit back, relax, and enjoy watching your fresh vegetables and fruits mature for a delicious harvest.