



Container Gardening

Intro: Container gardening is a great way to grow fresh vegetables and herbs almost year round. With thoughtful planning, you can grow a bounty of flowers, vegetables and herb on your balcony, patio, deck or even your front steps.

Start Small: If this is your first gardening experience, start small, focus on just a few vegetables that you really want to grow. Do a little research on what will make those few plants successful.

Choosing a Container:

Traditional Containers vs Self-watering Containers:

There are many different types of containers designed for gardening. For growing vegetables, I recommend a self-watering container. Self-watering containers have a built-in reservoir to provide plants with a regular supply of water. This is especially important in the extreme heat that we experience in Charleston. You can purchase your self-watering container in a store or online, or you can make your own out of food grade buckets or even a Rubbermaid storage bin, you can even convert traditional containers to self-watering containers. Check the resources list on this website for full instructions on purchasing or making your own self-watering container.

Traditional containers- if you already own containers or windowboxes that you want to use there are some vegetables and herbs that don't require as much water and will perform fairly well in a traditional container given regular care. There are also types and tricks for keeping your containers watered.

Shape and size: If you are looking to maximize space, rectangular or square containers are more compact than round containers because they can easily be placed in a line or square without losing much space. Windowbox plantings can provide plenty of fast-growing, shallow rooted crops like lettuce and salad greens, radishes, herbs and edible flowers.

The size of your container will be determined by the crop you want to grow. Typically, taller plants require larger containers to allow for root growth and maximize moisture in the soil, additionally some vegetables require trellises or fencing and need to be placed where they can easily reach a structure to climb.



Special varieties of vegetables have been bred to perform well in containers. Read the seed packet or catalog to see if such varieties are available.

Soil and Potting Mix: Fill your container with a mixture of potting mix and compost, supplemented with an organic fertilizer mix, or the following ingredients:

Mix all ingredients in a wheel barrow, clean recycling bin or large trashcan, then fill your containers

20 Quarts quality compost

20 Quarts potting mix such as Pro-Mix or Metro Mix

1/3 Cup Blood Meal

1/3 Cup Rock Phosphate

1/3 Cup Greensand

1 TBS Azomite (if available) provides trace minerals

Note: For self-watering containers, do not use a mix that contains special moisture retaining ingredients.

Watering:

Different crops have different needs and some like it a little dryer than others but in general, keep soil moist to the touch but not waterlogged. Check twice a day to start out or when the weather changes. The size and location of your container will also affect its watering needs.

Plants that like drier soil include: Basil, Dill, Fennel, Rosemary, Sage, Thyme

Start Right Now:

What you can plant today:

Resources, Books, Video, Web Links :

Great Books on Container Growing:

The Vegetable Gardener's Container Bible by Edward C. Smith

My go-to source for all things container gardening. This book covers how to make your own self-watering containers. Available for borrowing through the Charleston County Library.

*Fall is the time to test and amend your soil!