



Growing Vegetables In Containers

by *Sussex County Master Gardeners*

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Are you over wanting to physically dig a large vegetable garden, but still want the flavor of your favorite fresh tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants? Do you have limited gardening space? Do you have limited mobility? Do you have poor soil? Any one of these situations can make it difficult to be excited about vegetable gardening.

The answer could be growing vegetables in containers.

Containers have many advantages. They can be placed on rooftops, balconies, decks, or patios. They can be easily moved to follow the sun. The season can be extended by moving the plants/crops inside allowing you to garden year-round. Fresh herbs growing on the window sill in winter are heavenly. Another added bonus to containers is that there is very little or no weeding.



Sussex County Master Gardener Ana Dittel Photo

Panamanian Pepper grown in a container.

As in any type of gardening, location is very

Planting the Container

Any type of container can be used, including clay, plastic, wooden barrels, or planting bags. The container must be large enough to support the plant. A five-gallon container is recommended for a tomato plant. A larger container is more advisable than a smaller one since they don't need to be watered as often. Some other factors to consider when choosing a container is that clay pots tend to dry out faster than plastic and tend to be heavier. Regardless of type and size of container, there must be good drainage. Your pot must have a drainage hole in the bottom. Drainage can be improved by adding gravel in the bottom of the pot. Adding a few drainage holes to the side of the pot about an inch above the bottom is also recommended.

Disease and Insects

Disease and insect control for containers is the same as any garden. The key is to continually monitor the plant. If you see a diseased leaf, cut it

important. Most vegetables, such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and cucumbers need full sun which is about six to eight hours a day.

There are also a number of vegetables that need partial shade such as leafy greens, lettuce, and spinach. Those plants that need partial shade are more tolerant of morning sun as long as they have afternoon shade. It is important to do a little research on the plants you are planning to grow.

Basically any vegetable can be grown in a container. In addition to those mentioned above, consider squash, beans, onions, carrots, and turnips. Variety selection can be very important. For example some tomato varieties are very large and some are much smaller. It is wise to choose a variety that fits your particular situation.

There are some varieties of plants that have been bred to be grown in containers. For example 'Patio', 'Tiny Tim', 'Pixie', and 'Small Fry' are among the tomato varieties recommended for container growing. All varieties may not be readily available as small plants at the local nurseries. Ask the people at these nurseries for additional recommendations. Another option would be to grow your own plants from seeds.

Use one of the potting mixes termed "soilless media" in vegetable container gardening. These mixes are light, free of disease and weed seeds, and have moisture retention. Adding compost to the soilless mix can help with trace elements. Do not use soil from your garden as it is too heavy and probably includes weed seeds and diseases. Some potting mixes include plant nutrients. It is important to read the information on the label to understand what is included.

Most soilless mixes do not contain much in terms of nutrients so fertilize regularly. Liquid fish emulsion and liquid seaweed are great plant boosters. A weak solution of water-soluble fertilizer is the easiest type to manage.

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off. If you see some aphids, spray with soapy water. Don't let the pests get ahead of you.

Growing vegetables can be rewarding. Try it this year. Happy Gardening.

Questions

For questions on this subject or any gardening topic call the Master Gardener Helpline: In New Castle County, (302) 831-8862; in Kent County, (302) 730-4000; and in Sussex County, (302) 856-2585 x 535. The Master Gardeners monitor the Helpline in the winter but it may take a few days to get back to you.



For more information about Master Gardener workshops, garden helplines, presentations, becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer, or other activities, please visit these websites.

UD Website - <https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/canr/cooperative-extension/environmental-stewardship/master-gardeners/>

DSU Website- <https://cast.desu.edu/cooperative-extension/agriculture-natural-resources/delaware-master-gardeners>