

Vegetable Container Gardening



A how-to guide from the **Seed to Stomach Project**—Empowering people in Polk and Burnett Counties with the skills to grow their own food in limited spaces and turn it into healthy meals

WHY GROW FOOD IN CONTAINERS ?

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Many folks find enjoyment in gardening and enjoy eating their own locally grown and harvested produce. Even if you don't have the land base to install a traditional "in-ground" garden, you can still enjoy growing and eating your own produce with vegetable container gardening.

Container gardening—or growing plants in above ground pots, baskets, or other receptacles—allows you to grow plants in almost any environment, such as

your porch or patio. Gardening in containers also allows for the ability to move plants from place to place to take advantage of changing weather conditions, such as frost advisories or hail storms.

A container garden is an easy low-cost means to grow your own food which requires very little maintenance. By choosing attractive containers, your container gardening projects can add variety and appeal to your landscape. Alternatively, free plastic buckets

can be decorated to provide for a lower-cost attractive container.



LIMITATIONS TO CONTAINER GARDENING

Although there are advantages to container gardening, you will have more success if you keep these facts in mind:

1. Plants grown in contain-

ers require more water than traditional "in-ground" gardens. In hot, dry, windy conditions you may need to water up to 3 times per day!

2. Frequent watering may leach nutrients from the soil, so you may need to fertilize.

3. Certain vining crops, because of their growth habits, can't be grown in containers.

4. Large containers can be quite heavy when wet.

You can address these limitations with a little planning.



Supplies you will need

Containers

Drill or Hammer/Nail

Soil

Water

Fertilizers

Ruler

Screen or coffee filter (optional)

GETTING STARTED

The majority of the items needed for a successful container garden are readily available. Follow these simple steps to get started!

1. Choose your container. Containers can be as simple as ice cream buckets or as fancy as a cedar planting box. Choose the size of your container based on which vegetables you'd like to plant following the guidelines below, which are based on the depth of the container.
2. All containers need drainage holes. Use a drill or a hammer and nail to make 3-5 evenly spaced holes in the bottom of the container. An optional piece of screen or coffee filter can be placed in the bottom of the container over the holes to keep soil in the container.
3. Fill the container with soil, being careful to leave about an inch of headspace to allow for water to collect.
4. Plant your vegetables. Use the guidelines below to determine what time of the year to plant certain vegetables.
5. Maintain your vegetable plants with proper watering and fertilization (see page 3).
6. Enjoy your harvest!



COOL SEASON VEGETABLES

Vegetables that do best when planted in the spring or fall are called cool season vegetables. Follow the directions on the seed packet for information about planting space and depth. Cool season vegetables include:

- Beets—minimum 6" container depth
- Broccoli—12-18" container depth
- Cabbage—12-18" container depth
- Carrots—minimum 8" container depth
- Cauliflower—12-18" container depth
- Lettuce—minimum 6" container depth
- Mustard greens—minimum 8" container depth
- Parsley—minimum 6" container depth
- Peas—minimum 8" container depth
- Radishes—minimum 6" container depth
- Spinach—minimum 6" container depth

WARM SEASON VEGETABLES

As the name implies, warm season vegetables require warmer soil temperatures for survival. These vegetables should be planted after all danger of frost has passed (generally May 17-23 in Polk and Burnett Counties). Due to our short growing season, eggplant, pepper, and tomato should either be started inside or purchased as transplants (not seeds). When purchasing seeds, look for varieties described as compact, bush, tiny, dwarf, or patio which are better suited for container gardening.

- Bush beans—minimum 6" container depth
- Cucumber—minimum 10" container depth
- Summer squash—minimum 10" container depth
- Eggplant—minimum 10" container depth
- Pepper—minimum 8" container depth
- Tomato—12-18" container depth

To plant seedlings, remove the transplant from its pot by gently pulling near the base of the plant stem. Loosen the soil around the roots and plant the seedling at its original depth in your container.

LOCATION AND WATER AND FERTILIZER, OH MY!

When determining where to place your containers keep the following information in mind.

- Vegetable crops require at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day.
- Check the weather daily and be sure to move your plants to a warm or sheltered location in case of frost, high winds, or severe weather.

Vegetable plants require about 1 inch of water per week, either through rainfall or watering, to ensure adequate growth.

- Thorough, infrequent watering stimulates root growth better than frequent small watering. Pour until water runs out the bottom of the container.
- By watering at the base of the plant, versus on the leaves, you can help

prevent fungal diseases.

If using a soil-less potting mix, be sure to consider fertilizers since these mixes have very few nutrients. A 10-10-10 (N-P-K) fertilizer is suitable for most vegetables. Check the fertilizer label for specific application recommendations.

- Fertilize seedlings with a solution that has been diluted 50% to avoid burning young roots.



- Don't fertilize wilted plants; water and wait for them to recover.
- Organic (non-chemical) fertilizers options are available at most garden supply stores.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: The edges of my plant leaves are turning brown. What might be causing this?

A: The build-up of fertilizer in the soil medium may be your culprit. To address this problem halt fertilizing and be sure that each time you water your container that water runs out of the drainage holes.

Q: What might be causing the leaves of my plant to droop after watering?

A: The most likely cause of this problem is a lack of oxygen in your soil. Check to make sure the drainage holes in your container are not being blocked by soil and if necessary raise your container off the ground using boards or bricks.

Q: What is powdery mildew and how do I recognize it?

A: Powdery mildew is a fungal disease that thrives in cool damp conditions. Knowing these facts, powdery mildew can be prevented by providing your container gardens with plenty of sunlight and good air circulation. Powdery mildew can be recognized by white moldy areas on the leaves. Prune diseased leaves and dispose of them in the garbage.

Q: My plants look long and lanky. How can I correct this problem?

A: Try moving your container into an area that receives at least 6 hours of direct sun per day.

Q: Help, the bottom half of my plant is turning yellow!

A: The yellowing of the bottom half of a plant could be caused by overwatering or nutrient deficiency. Let the mix dry out a little or try using a fertilizer solution.

Q: How do I recognize insect damage on my container garden plants?

A: Most insects cause irregularly shaped holes in leaves or fruit. You can remove insects by hand or use floating row covers (mesh netting) as a preventative measure. If you do use floating row covers be sure to remove them when plants flower to ensure pollination. Don't remove bees and butterflies which provide beneficial pollination services.



Did you know?

Food stamp (FoodShare/SNAP) benefits can be used to purchase bedding plants.



USING YOUR HARVEST & SALAD DRESSING RECIPES

Lettuce is an inexpensive, easy crop to grow in a container and makes a great base for summer salads. Add other home-grown vegetables and try these tasty dressing recipes for a healthy meal or side dish! Be sure to store all harvested vegetables in the refrigerator and rinse them before using.

Thousand Island Dressing

- 1/3 cup plain nonfat yogurt
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 2 teaspoons white vinegar

Whisk together all ingredients in a small bowl until smooth.

Buttermilk Ranch Dressing

- ½ cup buttermilk
- ¼ cup reduced-fat mayonnaise
- ½ teaspoon garlic
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1/3 cup chopped fresh herbs, such as chives, tarragon, basil, or dill or 2-3 tablespoons dried herbs

Whisk buttermilk, mayonnaise, white-wine vinegar, garlic, salt and pepper in a small bowl until smooth. Stir in herbs.

Simple Balsamic Vinaigrette

- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 teaspoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon chopped garlic
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ¾ cup olive oil

Beat vinegar, sugar, garlic, salt, and pepper in a bowl until sugar and salt dissolves. Next, beat in the oil by droplets, whisking constantly. Alternatively, place all the ingredients in a lidded container and shake to combine.

RESOURCE GUIDE

Check out these local resources in Polk and Burnett Counties.

Container vegetable gardening supplies:

Abrahamson's Nursery, Landscaping, & Design, St. Croix Falls—483-3040

Balsam Lake Pro-Lawn Nursery, Balsam Lake—485-3131

Balsam's Lakeside Greenhouse Nursery & Landscaping—825-2202

Bergmann's Greenhouses, Clayton—948-2921

Dragonfly Gardens, Amery—268-7660

Grateful Gardens, Amery—268-9293

Kent's Perennials, St. Croix Falls—483-1775

Lake Kountry, Inc., Osceola—248-3018

North Country Greenhouse, Milltown—553-0619

Painted Farm & Gardens, Luck—419-1129

Polk County Recycling Center (containers), St. Croix Falls—483-1088

Rose Garden Gifts, Floral, & Greenhouse, Frederic—327-4281

Sunshine Gardens, Cushing—488-2864

Wood River Garden Store, Grantsburg—463-2426

Local hardware & grocery stores



More information on vegetable container gardening:

UW-Extension Offices:

- Burnett County (Siren)—349-2151
- Polk County (Balsam Lake)—485-8600

Local libraries, including:

- Burnett Community Library (Webster)—866-7697
- Polk County Library Federation (Balsam Lake)—485-8680

Your School District's Community Education Office

This publication was created by members of UW-Extension's 2009-2010 Polk-Burnett Leadership Academy as a final graduation project. To obtain a tool kit for hosting a container vegetable gardening class, please contact the Polk County UW-Extension Office, 485-8600.



