



Herbs and Vegetables for Containers

Any home with a sunny spot has room for at least one herb or vegetable plant in a container. Bush-type veggies and smaller sized herbs work best. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, green onions, beans, lettuce, squash and radishes are ideally suited for growing outdoors in pots. Vining veggies will also grow well in pots but require more space.

The following vegetable varieties are ideally suited for mini-gardens in containers. They are easily raised from seed, but store-bought transplants will give you a head start and many garden centers now carry fully planted container gardens.

- Tomatoes:** Patio, Pixie, Super Bush and Tiny Tim.
- Peppers:** Pizza My Heart, Yolo Wonder, Red Cherry and Jalapeno, a favorite hot pepper for salsas.
- Eggplant:** Florida Market, Black Beauty and Long Tom.
- Squash:** Gold Neck, Early Prolific, Zucco and Diplomat.
- Leaf Lettuce:** Most varieties, including Buttercrunch, Garden Babies, Salad Bowl, Romaine, Dark Green Boston, Ruby and Bibb.
- Green Onions:** Beltsville Bunching, Crystal Wax and Evergreen Bunching.
- Green Beans:** Topcrop, Greencrop, Blue Lake and Kentucky Wonder.
- Radishes:** Cherry Belle, Scarlet Globe and Icicle, a white radish.
- Parsley:** Any variety.
- Cucumbers:** Burpless, Bush Slicer, Liberty and Early Pik.

Special varieties have been developed for container growing, and Renee 's Garden Seeds offers both a vegetable collection and an herb collection suitable for pot cultivation. Renee 's vegetable varieties include Super Bush Tomato, Garden Babies Lettuce, Pot of Gold Chard, Bush Slicer Cucumber and Pizza My Heart Pepper.

Renee 's herb varieties include Cameo Basil, Fine Leaf Chives, Slow Bolt Cilantro, True Greek Oregano and Gigante Parsley.

Small and slow-growing herbs are some of the easiest to grow in containers. Sage, parsley, Greek oregano, rosemary, marjoram, basil, thyme, chives, and summer savory all do especially well.



Growing herbs in containers is easy and delicious!

Container growing is highly recommended for herbs like lavender, which need good drainage and tend to rot in overly wet garden soils, and for tender herbs that need to be over wintered indoors. An added plus is that containers are easily transported and can be arranged in attractive groupings or moved as environmental conditions change over the season.

Any container is suitable for growing herbs as long as it has a drainage hole. Adequate drainage is critical. A 1-inch layer of coarse gravel in the bottom of the container will improve drainage. The drain holes are best located along the side of the container, about 1/4 inch to 1/2 inch from the bottom.

Clay pots are often preferred because they are more porous than plastic, although clay pots will also dry out faster than plastic.

Almost any type of container can be used for growing vegetable plants. Bushel baskets, drums, gallon cans, tubs or wooden boxes all work well. Large glazed pots, window boxes, strawberry jars, and hanging baskets are often preferred for their ornamental characteristics. Newer innovations include the Topsy-Turvy™ and the Earth Box®.

The root systems of healthy plants tend to be slightly larger than the part growing above ground. A good rule of thumb is to allow one herb plant per gallon of planting mix. A twelve-inch pot will hold approximately three and a half gallons of mix, so it can hold three to four herb plants. A sixteen-inch pot will hold approximately five and a half gallons of mix and therefore can hold five to six herb plants or a tomato plant with a few small herbs at its base.

Five-gallon containers are best for most vegetable crops, although six- to ten-inch pots are satisfactory for varieties of green onion or radishes.

The planting mix should be loose and well-drained and must be free of disease and weed seeds. It should hold moisture and nutrients but drain well and be lightweight. Containers should be filled only to within about one inch of the top to allow room for watering.



Salad anyone?

Mixes for containers are available under a variety of trade names and are usually referred to as "soil-less" mixes. Soil-less mixes provide an excellent environment for growing healthy roots but will require added fertilizer if none is included in the mix.

Soil based potting mixes can be purchased or made at home. To make your own soil-based potting mix, combine one part good garden soil, one part peat moss and one part perlite or coarse sand and mix well. Fish emulsion fertilizer makes a good organic fertilizer for container grown plants. Since most herbs do not require high fertility, they will not require fertilizing as often as other container-grown plants such as flowers, vegetables or houseplants.

Plants growing in containers dry out faster than do plants growing in the ground. On a hot, sunny day, a container may require water once or twice daily. When the top of the soil feels dry, apply enough water to allow a small amount to come out the drainage holes in the bottom of the container. Pinch herb plants back to keep them bushy and compact, and remove any dead or diseased leaves from veggies and herbs to keep them healthy.

Herbs growing in containers can be moved indoors in the fall. Gradually move them into lower light conditions outdoors to help them adjust to the change in temperature and light. Herbs grown indoors should be placed in the sunniest window available or under fluorescent lights. Water only when the soil is dry. Avoid overwatering, which will cause root rot, and check plants regularly for common greenhouse pests such as aphids, spider mites, and whiteflies.