



How to Grow a Container Garden

Three Methods: [Growing a Container Herb or Vegetable Garden](#) [Growing a Container Flower Garden](#) [Growing a Container Water Garden](#)

Just because you live in a tiny apartment does not mean that you can't enjoy having a garden. If you are short on space, or just don't have the time to manage a large garden, you should consider starting a container garden in a planter. There are three main types of container gardens to choose from: herb or vegetable, flower, and water. Each is unique, different, and easy to make and care for.

Method
1

Growing a Container Herb or Vegetable Garden

1 Buy the right herbs or vegetables to plant in your container garden. While just about any type of herb will do well in a container, not all vegetables will. You can buy mature plants from a nursery or you can start them from seeds. Here are the types of herbs and vegetables that do well in container gardens.^[1]

- Herbs, such as basil, mint, and thyme. You can even plant a bunch in a large planter for a mini garden.
- All salad greens, such as collards, lettuce, mustard, and Swiss chard. Harvest only the outer layers.
- Tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers all do well in summer pots, but will need supports or cages.
- Cucumbers, zucchini, and other types of squash will also work. Cucumbers can also climb a trellis to save space.

2 Choose a planter with drainage holes at the bottom. This is important, otherwise the soil will become waterlogged and lead to root rot, which can kill your plant. Your planter can be made out of anything: wood, plastic, clay, etc. Keep in mind, however, that wood planters don't last for more than a few seasons. Also, if you live in a hot, dry climate, stay away from terracotta; they dry out too quickly and soak up too much moisture.

- If you absolutely must have a terracotta planter, get one that is sealed on the inside.

3 Make sure that the planter is the right shape and size for your plant. Short, wide pots are good for shallow-rooted, plants such as lettuce, while large, tall pots are good for vegetables, such as a zucchini or pumpkin. Half-size wine barrels also make great containers.^[2]

- A 10-inch (25.4 centimeters) pot is best for herbs and small plants, like strawberries and lettuce.
- A 14-inch (35.56 centimeters) pot is great for herbs and salad greens, like spinach, non-heading lettuce, and arugula plants.
- An 18-inch (45.72 centimeters) pot is good for small vegetables, such as broccoli, cauliflower, eggplant, and small peppers. It can also hold salad greens and herbs in small bunches.
- A 24-inch (60.96 centimeters) pot is best for large vegetables, such as cucumber, squash, and tomatoes. It can also hold small bunches of small vegetables and herbs.

4 Cover the drainage hole with a porous material. This will prevent the soil from falling out while allowing the water to pass through. You can use a scrap of burlap, window screening, or even a coffee filter.

- You will also want to place a dish under the planter to catch any excess water and keep your floor or patio clean.

5 Choose a good soil suitable for the type of plant you are growing. Different plants will have different needs; some plants need a well-draining soil while others need a water-retaining soil. In general, however, you should look for soil that is light, fluffy, and holds moisture well.^[3]

- Consider looking for ingredients, such as: aged bark, lime, perlite, sphagnum peat moss, and vermiculite. They will make the soil more expensive, but they will ensure the healthiest crops.^[4]

- Added wetting agents will help the soil stay evenly damp.
- Fertilizers are great additions, but you will need to add more fertilizer later on; it doesn't last forever!
- If you have thirsty plants, such as vegetables, consider getting a specially-formulated soil that retains water.^[5]

6 Fill the pot with soil 1 to 2 inches (2.54 to 5.08 centimeters) from the rim. Make sure to have some extra soil on hand, as the soil will compress a little once you water it. Do not pack or press down on the soil, however. Instead, gently tap the pot against the ground, or rock it side-to-side, to collapse any air pockets.^[6]

7 Add your plants, and fill the spaces with more soil. Carefully take your plant out of the container it came in, and make a hole in the soil large enough to hold the plant's root ball. Place the plant into the hole, and gently pat the soil around it.

- If you are starting your garden from seeds, then sow the seeds according to the directions on the seed packet.
- At this point, you can also add cage or supports, if needed.

8 Water the soil until water starts to leak out of the bottom of the pot. The soil will compress 15 to 20%, so you will have to add more soil on top and water again.^[7] Keep doing this until the soil level is 1 to 2 inches (2.54 to 5.08 centimeters) from the rim of the pot.

- Add some liquid plant food to the water for a nutritional boost.^[8]

9 Take care of your herbs or vegetables. Water them when the top inch (2.54 centimeters) of soil is dry. If you find that the soil is drying out too fast, add some mulching on top, such as fine bark or straw. If you live in a humid climate, use white pebbles instead; they will dry out faster and prevent root rot.^{[9][10]}

- Fertilize only when necessary, and be sure to use the right type of fertilizer for your herb or vegetable. Each plant will have different requirements.
- Make sure that your plants are getting around 5 hours of direct sunlight each day. Some plants, such as cabbage, can live in shaded areas. Others, such as cucumbers, thrive in full sun.

Method 2

Growing a Container Flower Garden

1 Buy plants from a nursery that will do well in containers and the amount of sunlight you get. Depending on where you place the container, your plants may get full sun, partial sun, or full shade. Different types of plants will do better in different types of conditions, so you should choose accordingly. Plants that do well in containers include:^[11]

- African daisies and begonias
- Ferns, ivy, and grasses
- Impatiens
- Marigolds and zinnias
- Pansies and petunias

2 Choose a large planter with a drain hole at the bottom. The planter should be large enough to hold several flowers. Keep in mind, however, that the larger the planter is, the more difficult it will be to move around.

- Avoid terracotta planters if you live in a hot, dry climate. It will soak up too much water and dry out too fast. If you must have a terracotta planter, make sure it is sealed on the inside.

3 Line the bottom of the planter with a porous material, such as a coffee filter, burlap, or window screen. This will prevent the soil from falling out while allowing the water to drain through.^[12] You will also need a dish to place under your planter to catch excess water and protect your floor or patio.

- If the drain hole is smaller than ½ inch (1.27 centimeters), then you do not need to line it.^[13]

Add the plants, and arrange them to your liking. Carefully take the plants out of the pots that they came in, and

- 4** arrange them in the planter until you are satisfied with the design. You can arrange them however you like, but here are some ideas to get you started:
 - Mix different colors of the same plant variety. Pansies and impatiens come in a variety of colors, which can make your garden look more interesting.^[14]
 - Combine different textures. This is a great idea for plants that will be growing in the shade. Pay attention to the different leaf shapes and colors, and mix them up.^[15]
 - If you have a large planter: place a tall, upright plant in the middle, and add one or two broad, mid-height plants. Fill the gaps and outer edges with one or two trailing plants.^[16]
- 5** **Fill the gaps between the flowers with potting soil.** Choose a potting soil that is lightweight and rich in nutrients. You can also get soil that has fertilizer mixed into it, but you will need to add more fertilizer as the year goes on.^[17]
- 6** **Water the soil until water starts to drain out of the bottom of the planter.** The soil will compress a little. When that happens, you will need to add more soil and water again. If you live in a hot, dry climate, consider adding some mulching on top of the soil to help seal the moisture in. If you live in a humid climate, consider adding some white pebbles on top of the soil instead. They will dry faster and prevent rot and mold.
- 7** **Take care of your plants.** Water your flowers every 2 to 3 days. If the summers are hot and dry, you'll need to water them every day. For bigger, healthier blooms, feed your flowers with an all-purpose plant food every few weeks. Lastly, remember to pick off any dead or wilted flowers and leaves. This will encourage blooming.^[18]

Method 3

Growing a Container Water Garden

- 1** **Choose a sturdy, watertight container that is at least 15 to 20 gallons (56.78 to 75.71 liters).**^[19] Pick something that is around 24 inches (60.96 centimeters) deep. This includes both the planting depth of the plant as well as the container it is planted in.
 - A container that is dark-colored inside is the best. It will make your water garden appear deeper, as well as discourage algae.<ref.http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/container-water-120737</ref>
- 2** **Choose your plants.** Plan on having some rooted, floating plants, as well as marginal plants and submerged/oxygenating plants. This will give your water garden some variety. How many plants you have will depend on how much space you have in your container. Do **not** overcrowd your container; no more than one-half of the water's surface should be covered by floating plants.^[20]
 - Rooted, floating plants include water lilies and lotuses.
 - Marginal plants, include water iris and dwarf papyrus.
 - Submerged (oxygenating) plants include anacharis and hornwort.
 - Floating plants include duckweed, fairy moss, and water hyacinth.
- 3** **Transfer your plants into new containers, if necessary.** Fill a cheap, plastic pot two-thirds of the way with heavy, clay loam/garden soil. Place the plant in the center of the soil, and top it off with a ½ -to ¾- inch (1.27 to 1.91 centimeters) layer of pea-sized pebbles or gravel. These pebbles will help anchor the plant and prevent the soil from leaking out.^[21]
 - Do **not** use plain gardening soil; it is too light.
 - If you bought your plants already potted at a nursery, then you can skip this step because they already come potted.
 - Be careful; some plants are "floaters" and do not need to be planted!
- 4** **Arrange the plants in the planter, and use bricks to adjust the plants to the correct height.** Keep the plants in their pots; this will allow you to rearrange your water garden at any time. How deep you plant everything will depend on the individual plant's needs; read the care label to find how deep you should plant it. Some plants need to be 6 to 8 inches (15.24 to 20.32 centimeters) under water while others need to be 12 to 18 inches (30.48 to 45.72

centimeters) under water.^[22]

- Use bricks to elevate shallow-water plants to the correct level.
- Save the floating plants until after you add the water.
- Don't overcrowd your planter. Remember, no more than half of the water's surface should be filled with plants.

5 Add the water, and make sure that it is safe for the plants. If you are using tap water, let it sit for 48 hours so that the chlorine can evaporate. You can also buy special de-chlorinating at the nursery.

<ref.<http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/container-water-120737></ref> Also, pay attention to the water temperature.

Some plants like warmer waters while others prefer cooler. If the water is too cold, the plants will go dormant.

- Most plants will do fine at 50°F (10°C), but some need at least 70°F (22°C).^[23]
- If you are using floating plants, now is the time to plop them in.

6 Take care of your plants. Make sure that they get at least 6 hours of sunlight each day. You will also want to add extra water to the container every few days as the water evaporates.<ref.<http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/container-water-120737></ref> Lastly, don't forget to give your plants some aquatic plant food and fertilizing tablets^[24]. If you live in a cool climate, you will need to overwinter your plants. You can do this by:^[25]

- Take the individual pots out of the water container.
- Remove any dead or rotting leaves.
- Place each pot in a plastic bag.
- Store in a cool, dark place. Make sure that the temperatures stay at 50°F (10°C).
- Replant everything in spring.

Tips

- Annuals are great flowers for containers because they will bloom all year. You can also plant perennials or bulbs. ^[26]
- If your planter doesn't have drainage holes, fill the bottom with gravel, then place that flowers (in cheap pots) on top of the gravel.^[27]
- Pay attention to the size of the pot. The larger the pot is, the more difficult it will be to handle.
- Put heavy planters on rolling casters to make them easier to move.^[28]
- Container gardens are great for those who live in apartments or don't have a lot of space.
- Container gardens are great for beginner gardeners, children, and those who don't want to plant a lot.
- Potting soil tends to be slightly acidic. If your plants don't like acidic soil, you may have to add some lime to it.

Warnings

- Avoid terracotta planters if you live in a hot climate. They will dry out too quickly and soak up too much water.^[29]
- Most vegetables grown in containers will be small and stunted compared to vegetables planted directly in the soil.
- Container plants may need more watering and fertilizing than normal.

Things You'll Need =

Container Herb or Vegetable Garden

- Large planter with drainage hole
- Burlap or coffee filter
- Potting soil
- Potted herbs or vegetables
- Plant cages or supports (optional)

- Fertilizer

Container Flower Garden

- Large planter with drainage hole
- Burlap or coffee filter
- Potting soil
- Potted flowers
- Fertilizer

Container Water Garden

- Large, sturdy, watertight container
- Separate pots for plants (if needed)
- Heavy, clay loam/garden soil (if needed)
- Pea-sized pebbles or gravel (if needed)
- Bricks
- Water
- Aquatic plant food
- Aquatic plant fertilizer

Sources and Citations

1. <https://bonnieplants.com/library/what-can-i-grow-in-a-pot/>
2. <https://bonnieplants.com/library/choose-right-container-plants/>
3. <https://bonnieplants.com/library/you-must-use-a-good-potting-mix/>

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