

# Container Vegetable Gardening

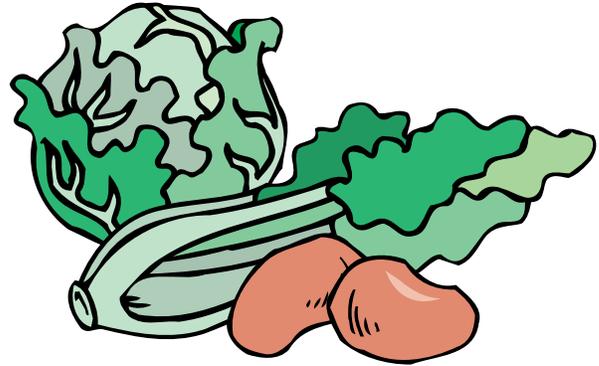
**A**partment and condominium dwellers can enjoy growing and eating fresh vegetables at home too. A sunny balcony or patio will allow anyone to become an urban gardener. Alaska's climate is ideal for container growing.

Container growing also allows gardeners to take advantage of warm microclimates which tomatoes and beans require. Hot spots exist where light reflects off buildings and where the plants are protected from cool winds. Growing vegetables in containers also allows one to move plants in and out of the house in case frost threatens.

**Containers.** Practically any container can be used for growing vegetables. Clay pots, plastic buckets, trays, wooden boxes and trash containers work well. All containers must have drainage holes in the bottom so excess water can drain out. Porous containers such as clay and wood, will have to be watered more often than plastic and metal. Matching container size with the amount of space the vegetable will need is important.

**Varieties.** There are many vegetable varieties suitable for container growing. Some varieties produce small plants with regular size vegetables. Midget varieties have also been developed which produce small vegetables on small plants. When growing midget varieties, check the seed packet for spacing and harvest information. There's no reason to wait all season to harvest 'Lady Finger' carrots. They only grow 5 inches long. Many Anchorage area greenhouses and garden centers carry a good selection of container vegetable varieties.

**Soil.** A good general potting mixture includes one part soil, one part moistened peat moss and one part coarse sand or vermiculite. Most locally produced topsoils already contains a high percentage of peat so adding the sand or vermiculite may be all that is necessary. A loose soil mix is important because it allows air to reach plant roots. The addition of a few handfuls of compost and bone meal will supply a slow release source of nutrients. Lime may be necessary to raise the pH to a suitable growing range. A soil-less potting soil can also be used.



**Fertilizer.** Container grown vegetables require more feeding because nutrients are washed out through the bottom of the pot during watering. Use a water soluble fertilizer according to the recommendations on the package. A high nitrogen fertilizer, such as 20-10-10, is suitable for leafy vegetables. Flowering and fruiting vegetables should have a high phosphorous fertilizer such as 15-30-15.

**Water.** The soil dries out quickly in containers. If your vegetables wilt from lack of water, they may never fully recover. Check the soil daily and water when needed. Always water thoroughly. Apply enough water so it drains out the bottom of the pot. Don't water so forcefully that you disturb surface roots and try to keep water off the leaves to prevent diseases. Large plants in small containers will dry out quickly. To reduce the need to water frequently try adding commercially available water absorbing polymers to the soil mix.

**Light.** Most vegetables grow best in full sunlight. Leafy vegetables have the lowest light requirements and can get by with 4 hours of direct light. Fruiting vegetables such as tomatoes and cucumbers need close to 10 hours of sunlight each day. Dedicated gardeners can move small containers to follow the path of the sun if necessary.

There are advantages to container gardening such as less soil preparation and fewer weeds. Having a salad growing at your doorstep is convenient and pretty too.

## Vegetable Varieties for Container Gardening

Vegetable	Variety	Minimum Container Size	Comments
<b>Beans, snap</b>	Pole or bush varieties	4" wide, 8" deep; plant 4" apart	Sunny, warm location
<b>Beets</b>	All varieties suitable; small beets include: Little Ball, Spirel, Bolthardy. Cold hardy varieties: Early Wonder, Detroit Dark Red Cylindra, Burpee Golden	6" deep, plant 2-4" apart	Withstands light frost. Tolerates light shade.
<b>Broccoli</b>	All varieties; small varieties: Green Dwarf, Dandy Earl. Cold hardy: Green Comet hybrid, Premium Crop Hybrid; De Cicco	5 gallon container. Space 15-18 inches apart.	Withstands some frost. Easiest member of cabbage family to grow.
<b>Brussel sprouts</b>	Cold hardy: Jade cross hybrid; Early Dwarf Danish, Long Island Improved	5 gallon container; space 15" apart.	For mild taste, wait until after frost to harvest.
<b>Cabbage</b>	Use early varieties: Earliana, Golden Acre; Early Jersey Wakefield, Red Express. Use midseason varieties: Copenhagen Market, Stonehead, Glory of Enkhuizen	5 gallon container; at least 10" deep. Space 12-24" apart.	Withstands some frost.
<b>Carrots</b>	Short varieties: Lady Finger, Little Finger, Short n Sweet, Baby Orange, Amstel, Mini Express. Round varieties: Kundulus, Planet, Glowing Ball, Parmex or Paris Market	3" wide, 6" deep. Thin to 1-2" apart.	Freshly manured soil causes carrots to split or fork as they grow. Tolerate partial shade.
<b>Cauliflower</b>	All varieties.	5 gallon. Space 6-8" apart.	Withstands light frost. To prevent sunlight from discoloring, pinch outer leaves together with a clothes pin once small heads are tea-cup sized.
<b>Cucumber</b>	Varieties: Bush crop, Space-master, Bush Whopper, Bush Champion, Burpee Bush	Loose, deep soil required. 24" x 36" x 10" box. Space 1 ½ to 3 inches apart in the row. Thin early to avoid tangled roots.	Full sun; short rooted varieties best for containers
<b>Lettuce</b>	Varieties: Summer bibb, Buttercrunch, Oakleaf, Slobolt, Black seeded Simpson, Early Prize-head, Green Ice, Cocarde, Red Sails, Salad Bowl, Deer Tongue Matchless	Plant seeds ½ inch deep. Container minimum is 8" wide, 4" deep. Thin seedlings to 8-10 inches apart. Cut plants back when they are 4-6" high to get regrowth.	Use bolt resistant varieties. "Bolt" means prematurely advancing to flower/seed production. Tolerates partial shade.
<b>Onions, green sets</b>	White, bunching varieties. White Sweet Spanish, Excel.	Use containers at least 6" deep. Thin plants to 3-6" apart.	Green onions: partial shade; Mature bulbs: full sun. Withstands light frost.

<b>Onions, white, yellow, red</b>	Early yellow globe, New York Early, Southport Red Globe	4" wide, 12" deep.	Withstands light frost.
<b>Peas</b>	Short: Little Marvel, Wando, Alaska, Intermediate: (2-3 feet tall). Green Arrow, Lincoln, Grenadier. Tall: (4-6' tall) Tall Telephone, Alderman	Plant 1 ½" deep. 6"x 8" deep container.	May require vertical support. Withstands light frost. Space plants 4" apart.
<b>Snap peas</b>	Intermediate: Sugar Ann, Sugar Daddy, Sugar Mel, Sugar Bon Tall: ( 6") Sugar Snap	Plant 1 ½" deep. 6"x 8" deep container.	May require vertical support. Withstands light frost. Space plants 4" apart.
<b>Radish</b>	All varieties. Eighteen day, Cherry Belle, Crimson Giant, French Breakfast, Champion, Sparkler, Comet, Parat German Giant, Scarlet Globe	Any size. Thin to 1" apart.	Plant alone in rows 6" apart, or between other vegetables like carrots. Some varieties tend to bolt. Withstands light frost. Require lots of water.
<b>Spinach</b>	Melody, Marathon, Tye Hybrid, Bloomsdale Long Standing, America	Plant ½ inch deep; Thin to 4-5" apart. Any size container	Withstands light frost, bolts during long days. Harvest before flowering. Substitute New Zealand Spinach or Orach. These have a spinach flavor, but are not as prone to bolt in summer. Keep pinching leaves for a continuous supply.
<b>Squash zucchini, yellow crookneck</b>	Dark Green Zucchini, Greyzini, Black Magic, Gold Rush Hybrid, Early Crookneck, Seneca Prolific	1 plant per 5 gallon container.	Frost sensitive. May require hand pollination of flowers.
<b>Tomatoes</b>	Full size: Stupice, Early Girl, Fireball	1 plant per 5 gallon container.	Stupice is a cool season variety. The others require a warm location.
<b>Tomatoes</b>	Container varieties: Florida Basket, Basket King, Goldie, Tumblin Tom.	8" hanging basket	Suitable for hanging baskets, cherry type.
	Patio, Gem State	8" pot	Upright plants
	Pixie, Burpee's Pixie Hybrid	1 gallon	Needs to be staked.
	Florida Petite, Tiny Tim	6" pot	Great for windowsills.
	Red Robin	10" pot	

