

## Container Gardening

Should the joy of gardening be reserved for those with a garden? Certainly not! You'll reap great happiness, plus pretty flowers and tasty vegetables, with container gardening.

There are all types of gardeners, living in all types of homes. Even if your little piece of the world consists of a balcony, patio or rooftop, you can still get your gardening fix. Container gardening offers bright, beautiful, stackable, and practically limitless options for getting the most green out of your space.

In the past, gardening was an interest shared solely by landowners. These days, even those confined to condos, apartments and flats can grow a dream garden without owning a trace of turf. Container gardening is simply planting fruits, flowers, herbs, or vegetables in a suitable vessel. Container gardening provides all the delights of landscaping, without the hassle of weekly mowing. In your container garden, you can grow annuals, perennials, climbing vines, even shrubs and small trees.

Creating a truly beautiful container garden means a lot more than putting a few plants in a few pots. A gorgeous garden requires careful thought and planning, whether it's on an acre of land or an 8 by 8 foot patio. The first step to planning your container garden is to find your USDA zone. This will help you to determine which types of plants will grow best under your conditions. For example, tropicals might not thrive on the west coast. Take note of the amount of daylight your balcony or patio receives, and note if it is morning or afternoon sun. The direction of sunlight can make a big difference in how well your plants will grow. When you have done your research, it's time to choose your plants.

Whenever possible, purchase your plants directly from the nearest nursery, as these will generally be well-established plants that are ready to transplant. You should never leave tender young plants outdoors in temperatures below 45° F temperature, or expose them to soaring winds. If there is the risk of frost, be sure to bring your plants of all sizes indoors for the night.

Virtually any plant that grows in the ground will grow in a container. Plants need nutritious soil, ample sunlight, regular watering and good drainage in order to grow and thrive. Virtually any type of container will do, as long as there are holes for drainage. If the water is not able to drain out, the roots will become soggy and eventually rot, killing the plant. Be sure that your container is big enough to let the roots grow and become well established. Be creative with the containers you choose. Mix and match a variety of colours and materials to create interest.

Container gardening is a great option for budget-conscious people. Pretty pots, a few bags of potting or topsoil and seedling plants or packs of seeds are all you need to create paradise on your patio. You should also pick up appropriate fertilizer and feed your plants as directed. In doing so, you'll have bigger, more brilliant blooms and healthier foliage.

Everyone loves the taste of fresh vegetables, and there's no reason why you can't harvest your own from your container garden. Most vegetables require only water and sunlight, so if you can provide these two elements, you've got yourself a salad in the making. Herbs, lettuce, peppers, tomatoes and even beans can be grown quite successfully in container gardens. You'll fill with pride as you offering these delicious homegrown gems to your dinner guests.

Even if you don't have a balcony or deck, container gardening can still be an option. You have windows, so get clearance from your landlord to hang window boxes. You can also grow annuals and vegetables on sunny window ledges inside your home. Community gardens are also great options for apartment dwellers. Ask your condominium manager or landlord to set aside a plot of land for a garden. You and other tenants set aside separate plots to plant and tend, or pool your resources and share the responsibilities and the rewards of the entire garden.

The onset of autumn doesn't necessarily have to mark the end of your container garden. When tender annuals and vegetables have withered, replace them with Mexican feather grass, cornflowers, eulalia grasses, lavender cottons, million bells, jasmine and other hardy varieties that can withstand autumn's chill.

Ask your garden centre, or search online to container gardening ideas from the industry's top gardeners, landscapers and outdoor living space designers. You'll find suggestions on how choose and care for your pots, how to grow succulents, roses and bulbs, and much more.

Even if you don't have a garden, you can still flex your green thumb. Create a container garden and enjoy the beauty of nature, wherever you are.