

# Container Garden Basics for Indoor and Outdoor Applications



## What Grows in a Container?

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- All herbs
- All greens like collards, lettuce, mustard, Swiss chard, and others
  - Pick only the outer leaves to keep the harvest going
- Eggplant and peppers of all types
- All tomatoes work in pots if the container is large enough and you have a good, tall cage or other support
  - Determinate varieties of tomatoes are best
- Cucumbers in a big pot can climb a trellis to save space.
- Zucchini and other squash work in large pots such as half barrels

(Source: <https://bonnieplants.com/library/what-can-i-grow-in-a-pot/>)

## What Do Plants Grown in Containers Need?

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- Most plants need ample space for roots to grow
- Six or more hours of sunlight (in most cases)
- Nutritious soil and compost
- Fertilizer for many vegetables that have higher nutrient requirements

## What Vegetables Can Be Grown Indoors?

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Some vegetables require ample sunlight. Keep this in mind when planning your indoor garden.

- All leafy greens like lettuce, spinach, arugula, etc.
- Brassicas: broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kohlrabi
- Root Vegetables: carrots, parsnips, potatoes, sweet potatoes, beets, turnips, rutabagas, ginger, etc.
- Most Legumes: peas and beans
- Herbs: Basil, lemon balm, rosemary, etc.
- Onions, chives, leeks, garlic greens
- Celery

## What Vegetables Can't be Grown Indoors (very well)

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General Rule: Anything that has a "fruit" will require pollination. You can do this manually if you prefer.

- Tomatoes
- Peppers

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- Corn

## Soil Mixes

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The soil for pots needs to drain well yet hold moisture and be nutrient dense. You can buy potting mix at any local nursery or hardware store. If you would like to get creative and maybe save money, try the soil recipe below:

- 25% top soil, 25% leaf compost, 50% peat moss or something similar (sprinkle perlite or vermiculite)

## Choosing the Right Container Size

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Nearly any type of container will work. The major items to consider are how quickly the pot will drain and retain moisture and size. You do not want the pots to dry out too quickly for most vegetables (though, be sure to pay attention to each vegetable's requirements) and roots will need room and access to nutrients.

Choosing a pot that is the right size for your plants will help ensure container gardening success. A pot that is too small means your plants will not produce as much, and you will need to work harder to keep them alive. If the pot is too large, you'll have to spend more money on potting soil than is necessary. Here's a guide to help you choose one that is just right.

A 24-inch diameter pot will hold one of the following:

- large pepper
- summer squash
- indeterminate tomato and cage
- cucumber
- artichoke
- combinations of vegetables and herbs

An 18-inch diameter pot will hold one of these:

- broccoli
- cauliflower
- large cabbage
- small eggplant
- all greens in multiples
- small pepper
- determinate tomato and support

A 14-inch diameter pot works for one of these:

- any herbs
- cabbage
- collards
- spinach (3 to 4)
- non-heading lettuce (3 to 4)
- arugula (3)

A 10-inch diameter pot will hold one of these:

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- small herbs
- strawberry
- lettuce

Keep in mind that not all pots are round and tall. Shallow-rooted plants such as lettuce will be happy in a container that is wider than it is tall. However, most vegetables will need deeper pots. Broad plants such as a zucchini or pumpkin will benefit from a container that is both broad and deep. Half-barrels are perfect for bigger plants such as tomatoes and squash. Use your best judgment to give your plants plenty of room for optimum harvests. Sometimes experience provides the best advice for the future.

(Source: <https://bonnieplants.com/library/choose-right-container-plants/>)

## Types of Containers

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### Terracotta

Attractive and affordable, terracotta clay pots have been used for generations. This traditional choice can be heavy and costly in large sizes, and they will break if dropped or exposed to freezing temperatures. Clay also dries out more quickly than some other materials, but it's still a favorite of many gardeners!

### Glazed Ceramic

Durable ceramic containers offer a range of colors for added style in the garden. They are fairly winter-hardy, but can be costly and heavy to move.

### Plastic

Plastic containers are affordable, durable, and lightweight. You may need to shop around to find a style that suits your design taste.

### Wooden

Natural in appearance, wooden containers, and half barrels make great containers. They will last several seasons. As they age, though, it becomes more difficult to move them.

### Concrete

Of all the choices, concrete pots are the most durable — and the heaviest, so plan to place them in a permanent spot. Large sizes can be costly.

### Fabric and/or Reusable Grocery Bag

Fabric pots, like a reusable grocery bag, and other fabric pots sold commercially, are an excellent and inexpensive way of growing in containers. While some of the pots are meant to last a long time, others will only last a season or two.

(Source: <https://bonnieplants.com/library/choose-right-container-plants/>)



Figure 1: Lettuce Container Garden in Whole Foods Bag. Photo © Kerry Michaels  
(Source: <https://www.thespruce.com/lettuce-garden-in-a-bag-848241#step9>)