

Container Gardening

For apartment-dwelling, or otherwise backyardless Torontonians, growing vegetables can seem completely out of reach. Container gardening, however, is a practical and flexible way to grow food, and a little careful planning in terms of vessels, soil, and seeds can lead to rewarding balcony harvests.

Vessels

When container gardening, it is important to choose a vessel with adequate **depth** for your intended crops (see chart on reverse). Without sufficient depth, plants cannot grow to maturity and may have problems fruiting. **Size** is also very important, if you will need to move your containers you should keep them small enough to be lifted even when full of soil and consider adding wheels. **Drainage** is another consideration; your container should have a few holes at the bottom and ideally be raised 1-2" above ground. Natural materials such as terra cotta or wood allow for better drainage than plastic or fiberglass, but may therefore require more frequent watering. Many container gardeners use **reclaimed wood** or other materials that have been thrown away to build their own bins - just make sure they have not held or been treated with any toxic materials before using!

Soil

Using the appropriate soil for planters is extremely important; regular topsoil used in containers easily dries out and becomes compacted, destroying plant roots. Container gardens require a soil with good water retention, including peat or, ideally, **coir fibre**, a by-product of coconut production that is more sustainable. Buying **organic soil** is also advisable, as it will retain nutrients longer than non-organic mixes, which can often become depleted after one growing season. Be sure to ask for advice at garden centres in order to get the soil that suits you best.

Gardening in containers has the benefit of allowing you to start with disease and pest free soil, however this soil is also often lacking in nutrients, so it is important to add **compost** or other amendments like **compost tea** (made by steeping compost in water).

Seeds

For container gardens, it is best to use plants that stay small. There are many dwarf vegetable varieties that are made especially for container gardening, a short list can be found in the chart on reverse. When growing tomatoes, for example, it is best to look for cherry tomatoes, or for **determinate** varieties, which grow in a bush, rather than their **indeterminate** vining cousins. Positioning plants is also important: try to make use of **vertical space**, hanging some plants and training others to climb upwards in order to maximize floor space. Observe sunlight patterns before planting as well, plants that require full sun (6+ hours/day) benefit from growing by a wall that absorbs sunlight and increases their heat absorption.

Vegetable	Container Varieties	Container Size	Spacing (inches)	Light Requirement	Minimum Depth (inches)
Beans, Bush	<i>Provider</i> <i>Tender Crop</i> <i>Top Crop</i>	Medium	2 to 3	sun	6
Beets	<i>Little Mini Ball</i> <i>Early red ball</i> <i>Little Egypt</i>	Medium	2 to 3	sun	6
Broccoli	<i>DeCicco</i> <i>Green Comet</i> <i>Green Valiant</i>	large	single plant	sun	10
Carrots	<i>Thumbelina</i> <i>Minicor</i> <i>Royal Nantes</i>	small/medium	1	sun	8
Cucumbers	<i>Early Pik</i> <i>Bush Pickle</i> <i>Spacemaster</i>	large	14 to 18	sun	10
Eggplant	<i>Slim Jim</i> <i>Pirouette</i> <i>Black Beauty</i>	large	single plant	sun	10
Lettuce (any variety)	<i>Salad Bowl</i> <i>Buttercrunch</i> <i>Ruby</i>	medium	4 to 6	partial shade	6
Onion	<i>Sweet Spanish</i> <i>Tokyo Long</i> <i>White</i>	small	2 to 3	partial shade	8
Pepper	<i>Ace</i> <i>sweetBanana</i> <i>Super Chile</i> <i>(hot)</i>	large	single plant	sun	8
Potato	<i>Red Pontiac</i> <i>Yellow Finn</i> <i>Butterfinger</i>	large	single plant	sun	start with 10" of soil in 30" deep container
Radish	<i>Easter Egg</i> <i>Cherry Belle</i> <i>Icicle</i>	small	1	partial shade	4
Summer Squash	<i>Gold Rush</i> <i>Scallopini</i> <i>Roly Poly</i>	large	single plant	sun	10
Swiss Chard	<i>Bright Lights</i> <i>Fordhook</i> <i>Giant</i> <i>Silverado</i>	medium	4 to 6	partial shade	8
Tomato	<i>Early Girl</i> <i>Superboy</i> <i>Sun Gold</i> <i>Tiny Tim</i> <i>Patio (dwarf)</i> <i>tumbling Tom</i> <i>(for baskets)</i>	large medium	single plant	sun	12 8
Winter Squash (Use bush types)	<i>Bush Delicata</i> <i>Cream of the Crop</i> <i>Butterbush</i>	large	single plant	sun	10

Herbs: They do well in window boxes or containers mixed with veggies and flowers, or in their own container groupings. Try herbs like mints and oregano in hanging baskets. Explore some or all of these options: basil, chives, mints, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, summer savory, marjoram, tarragon, and thyme.

Source: <http://www.kidsgardening.com/growingideas/projects/feb03/pg1.html>