

# Container Edibles

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## Why grow edibles in Containers?

- Portability - Take your garden with you if you're going to move.
- Grow edibles that are desirable (e.g., mint, Greek oregano, horseradish) but can be invasive when planted in the ground.
- Grow edibles that are not hardy in your area (e.g., tarragon, sweet bay, rosemary) but will survive if moved to a frost free place in winter.
- Stores root vegetables (e.g., potatoes, carrots) for "fresh digging" throughout the winter if the container is moved to a frost free place in winter.
- Increase temperature of the root zone for edibles (e.g., tomatoes, peppers) that prefer more warmth than typical Northwest summers.
- Keeps edibles up off the ground to minimize leaf diseases (e.g., tomato late blight, strawberry rot)
- Grow edibles when you only have limited space (e.g., deck or balcony).
- Provides more control over soil mixture for edibles needing sharp drainage (e.g., thyme, rosemary)
- New container mix each year ensures diseases are not carried over.
- Easier than building raised beds.

## Container Size

- Many herbs (e.g., tarragon, thyme) can be grown in containers as small as 8" wide by 8" deep.
- Herbs that spread aggressively (e.g., mint, Greek oregano) need a pot 1' or more in diameter.
- Potatoes, strawberries, peas, lettuce, bunching onions and carrots work best in a wide pot at least a foot deep. We use a black nursery pot 24" wide by 12" deep.
- Tomatoes, peppers, and invasive herbs (e.g., mint, oregano) grow well in pots 12" to 14" wide by at least 12" deep—deeper is better because it keeps the plants farther from the ground (a source of possible disease.)

## Container Soil

- **Do not** use garden soil! It's too heavy, doesn't drain well enough and may introduce disease.
- For herbs, use bagged cactus mix for sharp drainage. Bagged potting soil with lots of pumice would be a second choice.
- For tomatoes, peppers, strawberries, peas, onions and potatoes use compost (bagged potting soil could be used but this can be expensive for the larger pots needed.)

## Watering

- Limited soil volume often requires more frequent watering. Check moisture daily in warm weather.
- Watering frequency depends on the type of plant and the weather. Herbs (e.g., rosemary, thyme, mint, oregano) require less water than tomatoes, strawberries, onions and peppers.
- Rule of thumb: water when the top ¾ inch of soil is dry to the touch.
- Water the soil, but not the leaves to minimize the chance of disease.

## Fertilizer

- For healthy productive container edibles, fertilizer **must be** used (for everything except potatoes.) We use no fertilizer on potatoes. They produce well without it and fertilizer can enhance disease problems.
- We use mild organic pelletized chicken manure which also contains seven percent lime--sold under the trade name Nutri-Rich. Nutri-Rich is **not** the chicken bedding frequently sold in box stores which is mainly wood chips.



## Pests

- The same pests that attack edibles in the ground can attack them in containers.
- For slugs, we use Sluggo or Worry free which are safe for birds, pets, and you! **Avoid** Corry's, Deadline or other poisonous slug baits. Peas and lettuce **require** slug protection from the time they come up!
- Flea beetles and aphids are occasional pests. If they're, present, use a neem oil based spray such as Ferti-Lome triple action plus. Spray **under** the leaves as well as the tops.
- Powdery mildew is rare in container edibles **if watering is consistent**. A safe preventative is Green Cure. Once powdery mildew appears, Green Cure only prevents mildew on new growth.
- Because they are well off the ground and fresh soil mix is used each year, container tomatoes are much less susceptible to late blight.
- Root maggots in carrots and wire worms in potatoes are preventable with a barrier that stops the flying parent from laying eggs on the young plants. Try a row-crop cover such as Remay.

## Tomatoes, Eggplants and Peppers

- Use black nursery pots to absorb sunlight and warm the root zone.
- Black groundcover fabric and placing pots on the sunny south side of a house or fence can enhance the warmth these plants love.
- Of course, heat can also be increased by using a clear plastic cover or placing containers in a green house.
- Use a tomato cage for tomatoes to keep them from hanging down and potentially breaking under the weight of fruit.
- Grafted tomatoes are grafted onto very expansive root system to produce larger plants of the old stand-by varieties. We have them under test for container use. Early results show that there is little difference between grafted tomatoes and seed grown tomatoes **when grown in a container**. Results in the ground may be different.



## Potatoes

- Put one seed potato (golf ball to tennis ball size) in the center of the wide pot. Planting more than one per pot results in smaller potatoes.
- Consistent watering (when the top 3/4" of soil is dry) is very important for potatoes. Allowing the pot to dry out and then "catching up" with heavy watering can result in "hollow core," or rot in the center of the larger potatoes.



## Strawberries

- A wide pot at least 1 foot deep works well for strawberries. A 2' diameter pot will hold five plants—one in the center and four spaced evenly around the edge about 3" in.
- Pocketed strawberry pots work well, but they are much more expensive than black nursery pots.
- Pick strawberries regularly to keep them producing well.
- Seascape and Tristar are excellent ever bearing varieties for our area.
- A thin layer of bark on top of the container soil keeps berries from touching the soil and prevents berry rot.



## New Container Selections

- Columnar apples are apples that have no limbs and bear fruit along the trunk. They can be grown in a large container for their entire life. In our tests “Golden Sentinel” and “Scarlet Sentinel” have proven to be productive disease-resistant varieties for our area. “North Pole” has not proven to be disease resistant.
- There is a new series of columnar apples referred to as “Urban Apples.” We have not tested these in our garden, but we will!
- Brazel Berries are short, productive raspberries and blueberries bred for container culture. The raspberries produce well, but we still have them under test for long term results. We have not tested the blueberries, but we will!



## Figs

- Grow figs in a container at least 2' wide by 18" deep.
- Move to a frost-free place in winter so roots won't freeze.
- Place in the warmest, sunniest spot -might want to place where they get reflected heat from a wall.
- Good varieties are “Desert King” and “Lattarula.”



## Onion Family

- Garlic, shallot and onion sets are planted in the fall for harvest the following summer. Move container to a frost free area in winter—roots can freeze.
- Garlic, shallots and onions require lots of fertilizer and water until mature to get big bulbs. They are probably better grown in the ground.
- Bunching onions are planted from seed in the spring and grow well in containers.
- Leeks are planted from seed or starts in the spring and grow well in a pot 24" wide by 12" deep. Put 6" of soil in the bottom of the container and plant. As the leeks grow, fill in compost around them until the pot is full. Leeks are quite hardy and can be left outside in cold weather. Harvest as needed.

## Squash

- Bush type zucchini squash grow well in a container 24" wide by 12" deep, but they will be less productive than when grown in the ground. With zucchini, lower productivity may be a benefit!

## Aesthetic Considerations

- Black nursery pots can be placed in an appropriate sized ceramic pot to make them more attractive for a deck or patio.
- Placing black pot in a ceramic pot may reduce the soil temperature somewhat

## Dismal Failures!

- Corn will grow in a container, but it does not produce ears very well. Grow it in the ground!

**Try it! You'll like it.**

**More info: See our website:**

<http://laelsmoongarden.com/gardentips/ediblesincontainers.html>

