

Think container gardening if looking to raise vibrant veggies

CONTAINERS MIGHT BE A STRATEGY FOR SOME GARDENERS TO SKIRT THE CHALLENGES OF LIMITED USABLE SPACE, POOR SOILS, AND WYOMING'S HARSH CLIMATE.

Gardening with containers involves using a container big enough to hold sufficient soil for a vegetable plant to complete its life cycle.

Depending on the plant to be grown, containers allow gardeners to start plants indoors, move containers outside when temperatures are suitable, and, in some cases, move plants inside during cold temperatures or hazardous weather.

Container gardening can be on a small or large scale depending on how much production is desired and the types of vegetables. A small container garden might be one or two plants grown within a single container on a patio or next to a large window. Large scale might include several dozen containers or more outside or in a greenhouse-type structure. The size of the container can vary greatly from an 8-inch pot all the way up to large crates or recycled food grade tanks and totes.

Container considerations

There are some very important considerations no matter the size of the container garden.

1) The container shouldn't contain harmful chemicals or substances that might be absorbed through plant roots and transferred to the vegetables being consumed.

2) The container needs to be well drained. Water should be able to drain from the bottom of the container to avoid plant roots growing in an anaerobic environment (without air).

3) The bottom of the container should not be filled with rocks or materials to save on soil or add extra drainage. Plants will most often send roots to the bottom of the container and use the entire volume within each container. Potting soil is recommended for container gardens. Soil from gardens or landscapes can be used for containers but may present potential issues with proper drainage, insect or disease issues, and potential nutrient deficiencies.

4) Match the size of the container to the plant. Too small of a container will not provide enough space for large plants, and too large of a container for smaller plants will be a waste of resources and is more difficult to move and manage.

The size of the container also plays a role in watering: big containers equate to less frequent watering and small containers equate to more frequent watering. Consider the size of the container you plan to use and the ability for you or others to move and manage. Wet soil is very heavy, and many large containers may become permanent in their location once filled and prepared for the growing season.



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5) Aesthetics is important for some gardeners. Container gardening does not need to be an eyesore and in many cases can be used to help beautify a landscape or building.

6) Flowerpots or more decorative containers are generally the most common type of container, but other containers can be made from recycled materials such as 5-gallon buckets, wood or metal boxes, or recycled food containers. There are many options for recycled containers but keep in mind the previous information.

7) Find a material that works best for strength, looks, and water loss potential. Container material varies greatly. Plastic is the most common, but others might be made of clay, wood, ceramic, or other materials. Keep in mind different materials act differently in the environment. Unglazed clay pots tend to dry out quicker than plastic materials because they are more porous. While plastic might be lighter and have reduced water loss, unglazed clay containers might be more rigid than thinner plastic type pots. Freezing and thawing tends to breakdown clay pots over time. Ultraviolet rays can cause plastic to become brittle.

Container garden environment

The gardening environment should best benefit the plants: plentiful sunlight, close to water so the container can be watered consistently, receive protection from the wind, and can potentially be moved indoors if needed. Larger containers will help keep plants from blowing over during high winds.

Look for areas that provide the best microenvironment for plants. Many gardeners enjoy containers placed near garages, outbuildings, or large doors so smaller containers can be moved easily to avoid inclement weather or cold temperatures. Container caddies or dollies

work well to easily move plants from outside to protected structures.

Depending on the type of vegetables being grown, you may need to provide a structure for the plant to climb or spread out away from the container (climbing beans, peas, etc.). Plants grown vertically may also need to be secured to a deck railing or fence to avoid being knocked over by pets, careless humans, or gusty winds.

Watering methods

Container gardens tend to dry out more quickly than garden beds and should be checked daily. Containers can be watered by drip irrigation or by hand. Drip irrigation helps save time watering and maintains a consistent water source. Consistent watering is important for many plants. Tomato end blossom rot, for example, is a common issue when plants do not receive a consistent supply of water.

For more information, please contact your local University of Wyoming Extension Office or checkout UW Bulletin B-1239, *Landscaping: Container Gardening*, at bit.ly/uwyo_containergarden and UW Bulletin B-1115, *Gardening: Vegetables in Wyoming*, at bit.ly/wyo-grow-vegetables.

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Suggested container sizes for plants

Here are some recommendations for potential types of vegetables that do well in different-sized containers.

Small (0.5-2 gallon volume) – lettuce spinach, herbs (chives, cilantro, and parsley)

Medium (2-3 gallon volume) – Swiss chard, beans, determinate variety tomatoes, radishes, peas, herbs (rosemary, lavender, basil, oregano and marjoram)

Large (4-7 gallon volume or greater) – peppers, beans, indeterminate or determinate tomato varieties, eggplants, squash, cucumbers, carrots, potatoes, and beets.

