



PRODUCE GARDENING IN CONTAINERS

With garden space becoming more limited in higher density areas, we might feel limited by what we can grow. However, whatever outdoor space you have - a balcony, patio, courtyard, verandah or outdoor stairs area, growing vegetables in containers is easy and fun, and can be highly productive with the right know-how.

IT'S ALL ABOUT POSITION

As long as there is a sunny outdoor position, vegetables can successfully be grown in containers. The emphasis here is on sunlight, because unless your vegetables can bask in it for most of the day they won't flourish. Some can grow reasonably well with less sunlight, but they all will need some in order to convert the sun's energy into plant growth. Keep in mind that sometimes it can get too hot, so be prepared to shade your pots from strong afternoon sun on very hot days in summer.

AND THEN ABOUT SIZE

The size of the pot or container used for growing vegetables is very important - preferably use a pot at least **30-35cm** across. Vegetables need to grow quickly and require regular moisture and nutrients. If you use a smaller pot, you will have to water more often, particularly as the vegetable matures prior to harvesting time. *Keeping moisture levels consistent is the key.* If the potting mix is allowed to dry out for several days, it can be very difficult to re-wet it again and your produce will suffer.

The larger the pot or container, the easier and more successful it will be for growing vegetables.

POTS AIN'T POTS

When you think pots, think outside the "round"! Any container capable of holding soil, with drainage holes incorporated, can be used to grow vegies. Hanging baskets, grow-bags, window boxes, plastic tubs, even polystyrene fruit boxes are all capable of being used to grow food. There is even a growing trend of making edible walls, comprising of soil-filled vertical potting bags into which seedlings are tucked. These however, are especially high maintenance so only take them on if you can remember to water several times a day! If you are serious about growing some herbs and vegies but don't trust yourself to remember to water them every day, consider self-watering pots, such as the GreenSmart pots, or Vegepods, which are large enough to grow several vegie plants in.



A wall garden 'pot' with strawberry plants. This needs regular watering.

WHICH VEGETABLES CAN BE GROWN IN CONTAINERS?

Just about any vegetable that is suited to your climate will grow well in a container.

TOP 10 PLANTS FOR POTS

- Bush (or pot) tomatoes
- Strawberries
- Leafy herbs – basil, mint, parsley, coriander
- Italian herbs (rosemary, thyme, sage)
- Leafy lettuces
- Asian greens (bok choy etc)
- Citrus tree varieties (especially those on dwarf rootstock)
- Silverbeet and Spinach
- Snow peas and dwarf Beans
- Blueberries (use a special potting mix)

OTHER GOOD PLANTS FOR POTS

- Capsicum and chillis
- Broccoli and kale
- Eggplant



Vegetables and trees can also be companion planted with herbs in large containers making for a wonderful display.

POTTING MIX

This is critical to success. Don't skimp and buy cheap supermarket potting mix. It is nothing more than pine bark chips. Supplement any good potting mix with more water-holding crystals, some compost and/or manure.

WATER

Vegetables always require regular watering, whether they are grown in the ground or in pots. As a guide, water potted trees and vegetables every two days, and in hot weather you may need to water them daily.

When watering, make sure you give the mix a thorough drenching so that water drains from the drainage holes. Check by scratching the soil surface to make sure the water is penetrating and not just running down the sides. If not, the soil has become water-repellent and you will need to use a wetting agent to help the soil become wet again. Or, if the pot is not too large, submerge it into a tub filled with water for an hour. Add some liquid seaweed to this to give the plant a boost too. This will ensure the water has penetrated and moistened all the potting mix, giving better growth and flavour.

MULCH

Believe it or not, you should also mulch your potted plants. An organic mulch, such as shredded pea straw or sugar cane is ideal. If you have permanent plantings, you could also use large pebbles, especially if the look is important to you.

FERTILISING VEGETABLES

Many vegetables are heavy feeders and require regular fertilising from seedling stage right through to maturity or harvesting.

Use a fully organic liquid fertiliser, such as one containing fish and seaweed, plus trace elements, vitamins and minerals that combine to promote strong and healthy plant growth. Prepare it by mixing the concentrated liquid with some water as per the directions and apply it all over the plant, thoroughly saturating both the soil and the foliage.



GreenSmart self-watering pot, with broccoli and companion planting of Heartsease



Broccoli in a polystyrene fruit box



Asian greens, lettuces and radishes grown in a kiddie's sand pit



Self-contained garden beds, such as the Vegepod, come in 3 sizes and can be taken with you when you move house. They can be placed on concrete and the shade cover protects from excessive heat and possums!



An old wheelbarrow takes on a new lease of life. The holes, which made it useless as a wheelbarrow, make for perfect drainage!