

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



April 15, 2023

Vegetables Grown in Containers Improves Accessibility

How can I make vegetable gardening easier to access? How about overcoming limited space and time? Bring the garden closer to the door by growing the plants in containers. The containers placed on a deck or patio make them accessible. They also solve the problem of trying to grow plants in hard or rocky soil or requiring a tiller to prepare the soil.

The amount of sunlight for growing vegetables is important. Most vegetables require full sun which is at least 6 hours of sunlight. Take advantage of various microclimates on your property or rented space. Grow lettuce in a cool, shaded area. Locate heat-loving plants, such as eggplant and tomato, in full sun where reflections from buildings or patio surfaces add to the heat while the weather is still cool.

Vegetables suited for containers include beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cucumber, bush cucumber, eggplant, kale, lettuce, pepper, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard, tomatoes, cherry or grape tomatoes, turnips, and zucchini. Herbs suitable for containers include chives, garden thyme, basil, marjoram, and summer savory. These plants require full sun for the best fruit, vegetable, or herb production.

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Containers are available in many sizes, forms, and shapes. They can be made of clay, redwood, cedar wood, or plastic. Unusual containers add interest to the garden. Never use containers that have held products that would be toxic to plants or people. Wood for use around vegetable plants should never be treated with creosote or pentachlorophenol (Penta) wood preservatives. These may be toxic to plants and harmful to people as well.

The size of the container depends on the growth requirements of the vegetable. Watering the plants is easier if using big containers for the larger plants. A 4 to 5-gallon bucket works well for one plant of the following vegetables: eggplant, tomato, pepper, yellow squash, and zucchini. Make sure the buckets are food grade in order to avoid chemical residues from leaching into the soil. Some restaurants, bakeries, and stores may have food grade buckets for sale.

Containers at least 6 to 8 inches deep are adequate for many other vegetables such as beets, broccoli, cucumbers, kale, lettuce, onions, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard, and turnips. Green beans, cabbage, carrots, collards, and peas grow best in containers at least 10 inches deep. The spacing between individual plants within the container varies depending on the vegetable. Cabbage and broccoli should be planted in single pots if they cannot be placed at least 15 inches apart. Cherry tomato plants that are compact and called patio size may be grown in hanging baskets.

A 12 by 48 by 8 inch container makes a great patio herb garden. Chives, garden thyme, basil, marjoram, and summer savory will all do well in such a planter box. Mints, oregano, and rosemary grow well in hanging baskets because of their sprawling growth habit.

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Make sure a container has drainage holes in the bottom so the plant roots will not stand in water, which may cause them to rot and die. A saucer placed under the container collects the water, but remember to empty it to avoid keeping the plants too wet or allowing mosquitoes to develop.

Use a commercially prepared soil mix in the containers. Using only garden soil is not recommended because it will not allow proper drainage. The commercially prepared mix should allow water to drain easily. If it is too fine, the mix will hold moisture and cause the plant roots to rot.

Pay particular attention to watering container gardens. Container soils can dry out very quickly, especially on a concrete patio in full sun. Water when the soil feels dry, which may be several times each week as the plants grow larger. However, the soil should not be soggy or have water standing on top. Another tip is to add enough water until it runs out the drainage holes. This helps to prevent a buildup of salts in the soil from the fertilizer.

Fertilize plants once every two to three weeks with a soluble plant fertilizer according to the label directions.

When starting vegetables from seed directly in a pot, the first fertilizer application is made three weeks after the plants have two sets of leaves. Then repeat once a week using a soluble plant fertilizer at one-half strength according to the label directions.

Keep a close watch for insects and diseases which may attack vegetables. Identify any problems and take appropriate control measures. Contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office if you have problems with identifying diseases and insect pests.

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Protect plants from very high heat caused by light reflection from pavement or a building. If necessary, move them to a cooler spot or shade them during the hottest part of the day. Also, plants may need to be moved to a more sheltered location during severe rain or wind storms.

For more information about gardening in containers, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

To find more information about growing vegetables in containers or in the garden the publication on "Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky" is available on our website at <https://daviess.ca.uky.edu/horticulture> or from our office.

Upcoming events:

Opening day of the Owensboro Regional Farmers' Market is Saturday, April 15 from 8:00 a.m. to noon. Their website is <http://www.owensbororegionalfarmersmarket.org/>.

"Natives and You" presented by Donna Rae Woolston is scheduled for April 19 at 1:00 p.m. at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office. Participants will learn about native plants for the garden. The program is co-sponsored by the Green River Area Extension Master Gardeners.

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