Creative Container Gardening

Annette Wszelaki
Commercial Vegetable Specialist

Finding a Spot to Garden

• You don’t need a lot of space to have a vegetable garden!
• All you need is a:
  – Patio
  – Deck
  – Balcony
  – Doorstep
  – Windowsill

Benefits of Container Gardening

• Accessibility
• Side-steps soil problems
• Requires little or no land
• Convenient
• Economical
• Efficient

Selecting Containers

• Be creative!
• Plan for drainage
  – If adding holes, drill four or more ¼” spaced evenly
  – Put ~ ½” coarse gravel or small stones in bottom
• Small containers will dry out more quickly
Recycling Containers

- Scrub them well
- Rinse in a mild bleach solution
  - (9 parts water:1 part bleach)

Preparing Containers

- For porous containers (clay, wood, cement), soak well in water before filling
**The Container Dictates the Environment**

- Plants will be more sensitive to temperature extremes
- Overheating can be the end of your planting
- Thick wood insulates best
- Dark colored containers absorb more heat
- Light colored containers reflect heat

**Choose the Right Container**

- Shallow containers (9-12” deep)
  - Beets
  - Leaf lettuce
  - Onions
  - Radishes
  - Spinach
  - Swiss chard

- Medium-depth containers (12-18” deep)
  - 9 to 18 inches
    - Carrots
  - 12 to 14 inches
    - Broccoli
    - Cabbage
    - Cauliflower
  - 14 to 16 inches
    - Peas
    - Peppers
    - Cherry tomatoes

- Deep containers (16-18” deep)
  - Beans
  - Cucumbers
  - Potatoes
  - Summer Squash
  - Tomatoes

**Choosing Your Soil**

- Media should drain well, but not dry out too fast
- Soilless mixes are a good choice:
  - Free of disease organisms
  - Less likely to compact
  - Hold moisture and nutrients well
  - Lightweight-containers portable

**Potting Mix Recipe**

- Shredded sphagnum peat moss 1 bushel
- Vermiculite 1 bushel
- Ground limestone 1 ¾ cups
- Superphosphate (0-20-0) ½ cup
- (0-45-0) ¼ cup
- Granular 5-10-5 fertilizer 1 cup

Moisten with water and store in plastic garbage bags or trash (clean!) can. Makes 2 bushels.
**Organic Potting Mix Recipe**

- Shredded sphagnum peat moss: 1 bushel
- Vermiculite: 1 bushel
- Ground limestone: 1 ¼ cups
- Bonemeal: 10 lbs.
- Bloodmeal: 5 lbs.

Moisten with water and store in plastic garbage bags or trash (clean!) can. Makes 2 bushels.

---

**Caring for Your Containers**

- **Location**
  - Most vegetables grow & produce best when grown in full sun (at least 6 hours/day... 8 hours better!)
  - Fruit bearing plants require the most sun (cukes, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, etc.)
  - Leafy vegetables (greens, cabbage, herbs) tolerate more shade than root crops (radishes, beets, onions)

---

**Watering**

- Required frequently! Daily?
- Water thoroughly and deeply
- Never let soil dry out completely
- Overwatering will slowly kill your plants
- Avoid wetting leaves
- Water first thing in the morning

---

**Fertilization**

- Container-grown plants require more frequent fertilization than field-grown
  - Less soil from which to obtain nutrients
  - Apply a soluble fertilizer every week or two

---

**Trellising or Caging**

- Some tomatoes, cukes, beans and greens will require
- Be sure not to ‘shade out’ other containers
Diagnosing Common Problems in Container Gardens

The Container Doctor

• Symptoms:
  – Plants tall, spindly and unproductive

• Cause:
  – Insufficient light
  – Excessive nitrogen

• The Cure:
  – Move container to receive more sun
  – Reduce feeding intervals

The Container Doctor

• Symptoms:
  – Plants yellowing from bottom, lack vigor, poor color

• Cause:
  – Excessive water
  – Low fertility

• The Cure:
  – Reduce watering interval; check drainage
  – Increase fertility level

The Container Doctor

• Symptoms:
  – Plants wilting with sufficient moisture present

• Cause:
  – Poor drainage and aeration

• The Cure:
  – Use mix containing higher organic matter
  – Increase # of drainage holes

The Container Doctor

• Symptoms:
  – Marginal burning or firing of the leaves

• Cause:
  – High salts

• The Cure:
  – Leach container with tap water at regular intervals

The Container Doctor

• Symptoms:
  – Plants stunted in growth; sickly, purplish color

• The Cause:
  – Low temperature
  – Low phosphate

• Cure:
  – Relocate container to warmer area
  – Increase phosphate level
The Container Doctor

- Symptoms:
  - Holes in leaves, leaves distorted in shape
- Cause:
  - Insects
- The Cure:
  - Scout your containers!
  - Squash them!
  - Dilute soap solution
  - Use a recommended insecticide

The Container Doctor

- Symptoms:
  - Plants leaves with spots; dead dried areas, or powdery or rusty areas
- Cause:
  - Plant diseases
- The Cure:
  - Remove infected parts
  - Be careful what time/how you’re watering
  - Give your plants more space next year!

Companion Planting

- Planting species together that provide one or more plants a cultural benefit

Potential Benefits

- Attract beneficial insects
- Increased pollination
- Fertilizer
- Shade
- Weed control
- Trellis system
- Increased yields

The Italian Container

- Basil
- Oregano
- A patio tomato
- A sweet pepper

From www.motherearthsgarden.com

The Fiesta Container

- Cilantro
- Your favorite hot pepper
- Chives
- A patio tomato
- Tomatillo plant

From www.motherearthsgarden.com
The Summer Tea Container

- Lemon balm (plant in its own pot)
- Echinacea
- Bee Balm (Oswego tea)
- Chamomile
- Lavender
- Mint

From www.motherearthsgarden.com

Thank you!
Questions?
Email annettew@utk.edu
http://organics.tennessee.edu
http://vegetables.tennessee.edu

Thank you!
Questions?
Email annettew@utk.edu
http://organics.tennessee.edu
http://vegetables.tennessee.edu