

An NKHS How-To Guide

Container Gardening



The smallest patio or yard space can house many containers of herbs, vegetables, flowers, and shrubs. Planter boxes, wooden barrels, hanging baskets and large pots are just a few containers that can be used. Inside or outside, the container garden is limited only by your imagination. ..

Consider the following guidelines when choosing containers:

- For most plants, use containers between 15 and 120 quarts capacity. Small pots restrict the root area and also dry out quickly.
 - If you start a perennial in a small pot, be sure you replot it into a bigger pot before late summer.
 - You can plant annuals in small containers because they only last for one season.
- Make sure your pot has adequate drainage. Holes should be ½ inch across. Line the base of the pot with newspaper to prevent soil loss. You can add a layer of small gravel in the bottom of your containers to aid drainage. It's also a good idea to set containers on bricks or blocks to ensure they have good free drainage.
- Avoid containers with narrow openings.
- Cheap plastic pots may deteriorate in sunlight and terra cotta pots dry out rapidly. Glazed ceramic pots are excellent choices, but do require several drainage holes.
- If you choose clay pots, remember clay is porous and water is lost from the sides of the container. Therefore, plants in clay pots need to be checked closely for loss of moisture.
- Wooden containers may rot after a few seasons. Redwood and cedar are resistant to rot and can be used without staining or painting. Avoid wood treated with creosote or other toxic compounds, since vapors can damage the plants. One advantage of wooden containers is that they can be built to sizes and shapes that suit the location.
- In hot climates use light-colored containers to lessen heat absorption and discourage uneven root growth.

Growing mixture:

Make sure your planting medium drains rapidly, but retains enough moisture to keep the roots evenly moist. Check plant requirement to see if sand is needed. Compost makes excellent potting soil.

If compost is not available, check garden stores for potting soil. Commercial potting soil is relatively inexpensive and is ready to use. Most gardeners find that a "soilless" potting mix works best. In addition to draining quickly, "soilless" mixes are lightweight and free from soil-borne diseases and weed seeds. Get it at most garden centers.

When you add your soil to your container, leave a 2 inch space between the top of the soil and the top of the container. You will be able to add ½ inch or so of mulch later.

Sunlight:

Your container garden will need at least five hours of direct sunlight each day, and many plants will benefit with even more. Most herbs need lots of sunlight. Again read your seed package to find out what is needed, and depth of planting the seeds.

Fertilizer:

Potting mixes drain water rapidly, so fertilizer will be washed out of the container as you water. It's a good idea to use a diluted liquid fertilizer (Miracle Grow) with every other watering. Check the labels on the products in your garden center to be sure that they contain a complete, balanced solution. Fish emulsion or liquid seaweed are great plant boosters.

Watering:

In an exposed location, container plants lose moisture quickly. Some plants will need to be watered daily, especially during hot, dry weather. Some garden centers carry a soil mix with "water guard" in it. You don't have to water as frequently. You will see a small white pellet in the mix.

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