

Consider growing a container vegetable garden  
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Many vegetables grow well in containers located on a patio, porch, balcony or windowsill. Limited garden space precludes being able to grow some of the larger vegetables. For instance, growing corn on a deck may not be practical. But a wide variety of crops can be planted, including lettuce, herbs, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, carrots, beans, squash, radishes, strawberries, watermelon, chard and spinach.

There are some dwarf and miniature varieties, such as "Thumbelina" carrots or other "baby" vegetables that work particularly well in small confines. Vine crops can be put in hanging baskets or grown in oak barrels or large pots and trained vertically on trellises, stakes or railings.



The amount of sunlight available will affect your choice of crops. Root and leaf crops (beets, turnips, lettuce, cabbage, mustard greens) can tolerate light shade. But vegetables grown for their fruits, including tomatoes, green beans and peppers must have from six to eight hours of direct sunlight each day.



Almost any type of container can be used, from bushel baskets, metal drums, and garbage cans to plastic tubs, wooden boxes and well-rinsed cut-off gallon jugs. Ten-inch pots are good for green onions, parsley and herbs. For plants with larger root systems, such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplant, five-gallon containers or larger are best.

No matter what container type is used, adequate drainage is a must. Drill drain holes along the side about one-half inch from the bottom and make sure the soil drains well. It also helps to elevate the pot with bricks or boards, off the surface of your patio or pot saucer to allow good drainage.

As in bigger gardens, container grown vegetables can be grown from seed, or they can be planted as transplants. Good soil really helps. Use a packaged potting soil or composted soil available at local garden centers. These purchased potting soils make for excellent container gardening because they are lightweight, sterile and drain well.

Vegetables grown in containers need regular fertilization. A soluble, all-purpose fertilizer that can be mixed in water is the easiest type to use with container plants. Fertilize every three to four days with a solution that is half the strength of the recommended mixing ratio. Dry fertilizers sprinkled on top of the soil offer a second-best alternative. If you use them, fertilize every three weeks. Organic materials including compost, blood meal or rock phosphate and greensand can be used for fertilizer as well. If using

animal manures, be sure they are fully composted. Properly composted animal manure kills most E. Coli. Even if using composted manure, be sure to always wash fruits and vegetables before eating them.

Religious regular watering is also essential. The soil in containers can dry out quickly, especially on a concrete patio in full sun. Daily watering is not unusual, but don't let the soil become soggy or have water standing on top of it. Water when the soil feels dry and until it runs out the drain holes. After spring and early summer crops are harvested, the containers can be replanted with late summer and fall vegetables.



UCCE Master Gardeners will be offering two free classes in March. On March 16; Contain It, Raise It, Bale It- Growing Options for Your Garden and March 23 Productive Plant Propagation. Both classes will be held from 9 a.m. – noon at 12200-B Airport Rd. in Jackson CA. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of Amador County website at <http://ucanr.edu/mgamador>. UCCE Master Gardeners of Amador County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Thursday, 10:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (209) 223-6838. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 12200-B Airport Rd. in Jackson. You can also find us on Facebook.

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