



Container Gardening

Even though the company has large outdoor trial gardens, I really enjoy planting a cheerful profusion of flowers and savory herbs in containers of all sizes and shapes on the patio outside my kitchen door.

For many urban gardeners, container gardens on a small deck, patio or rooftop may be the only option available. Whether you have a little space or a lot, container gardening is an easy way to create an inviting and relaxing outdoor room, grow first-rate vegetables and add enjoyment to the summer season. Your garden area can be a patio, balcony, terrace, rooftop or any undeveloped site where the soil is not suitable for in-ground gardening. In fact, one of my favorite gardening pen-pals grows her eggplants in big pots on board the converted tugboat she and her husband live on!

For those who do not have the time or whose physical capacities are limited, container gardening is a special source of satisfaction. If you are a cooking oriented gardener, you'll find having containers of your favorite culinary herbs really close at hand to snip at will is a real advantage.

Gardening in containers--a quick course

Remember that all container plants need more attention than plants in the ground, as they rely solely on the gardener for all their needs. Confined to a limited space, they will quickly become stressed if essential water or fertilizer isn't available regularly. It's not hard to provide a good growing environment; just remember the essentials:



- properly drained soil mix
- adequate and regular supplemental fertilizer
- enough but not too much water
- the right amount of light
- some protection from temperature extremes

Use a properly drained soil mix - don't use garden soil for containers! A good commercial potting mix will give consistent drainage, is free of weeds and pests, and it won't compact to a rock-hard mass that water can't penetrate by mid summer. I

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always replenish the soil mix for containers at the beginning of each season to restore the tilth of the soil in my pots and ensure the best conditions for young plants.

Gardening in containers isn't very complex or complicated. Start by using the right sized containers for plants you mean to grow through the summer. Containers can be whatever suits your eye and pocket book, from fancy big clay pots, lightweight pots, and window boxes, to wine barrels, recycled pulp containers, wooden boxes or even big drain tiles you may have available. Just be sure you have large enough containers to hold the full-grown plants and their root systems and provide good drainage, air circulation, and season-long root space

Water and Fertilize

Water and remove spent blooms on container plants regularly and make it a part of your everyday routine. In the heat of summer, containers may need water every day. I put my forefinger in the soil and if it is dry beyond the first joint, I water immediately. Feed your container plants throughout the season with strength liquid fertilizer solution, applying it to the soil about every 3 weeks. (Being an organic gardener, I use a mix of equal parts of diluted liquid fish emulsion and kelp, and recommend it.) I also adjust for the blast of summer heat by keeping my containers on casters so I can move them around. You should be able to find these little wooden or plastic platforms to set your plants on - square or round and fitted with wheeled casters - at a local nursery. Another advantage is that the platforms keep containers from staining the patio (or deck). And, if I go away for the weekend, the containers can easily be wheeled and grouped in a cooler, shadier space so they won't dry out while I'm away.

Container Herbs

Even though I grow an extensive backyard herb garden, I still plant my favorites for everyday use in 4 or 5 pots set outside the kitchen patio so I can get to them quickly whenever a recipe needs a little herbal zing. Best of all, container herbs need little weeding and no hoeing and can be moved easily. I always plant several kinds of basil in a big deep pot so I can use them in salads and sauts and, late in summer when they start to flower, I enjoy them as fragrant ornamental edibles.



Strappy mounds of [flowering chives and garlic chives](#) or [shiny broadleaf parsley](#) are also delicious and attractive container plants as are low mounding shrubby perennials such as [thyme](#), [oregano](#), and [marjoram](#). Blue-green leafy [dill fronds](#) are pretty as a picture and in a nearby container you can snip them off to top salads and stews anytime. I grow clumps of [cilantro](#) in containers to add to grilled shrimp, chicken or mix into fresh salsa, keeping them in clear bright shade rather than full sunlight in the heat of summer so the plants stay leafy as long as possible. My "outdoor room" is especially fragrant with the blooms of my [container lavenders](#).

Container Flowers



Free-flowering annuals are perfect choices to bring out the artist in every gardener. Choose varieties not only for their individual beauty but for the way they'll look in combination. Look for flowers that spread and mound in habit like [cascading nasturtiums](#), soft [alyssum](#), perky [pansies](#) or old fashioned varieties that have a wonderful perfume, such as heliotrope or dwarf Cupid or Color Palette [Sweet Peas](#). Don't miss low growing varieties of [zinnias](#) such as Pixie Sunshine, [marigolds](#), [phlox](#), [dwarf cosmos](#) and dwarf bedding [sunflowers](#). [Little Angel Wings roses](#) or [delicious Alpine strawberries](#) are wonderful in containers.

You can plant one variety to a container and cluster them all around your patio to take advantage of different microclimates 3 medium sized pots placed together will make a beautiful combination of color and form. Or you can plant a mixed bouquet of 3 or 4 plants in a big container at least 18 inches wide. In combining flowers, keep their final heights in mind, planting low trailing plants at the outer edge, medium ones inside and the tallest varieties at the center. Space plants closely, about 4 inches apart, so they will grow to cover the container's surface. Be sure to feed them regularly to encourage lush growth.

Container Vegetables

Growing an edible container garden is easy and rewarding. [Tomatoes](#), [peppers](#), [eggplants](#), [chiles](#), [cucumbers](#), [beans](#), and [squash](#) will reward you with beautiful plants and abundant harvests in warm weather. In the cooler seasons of spring and fall, you can grow all kinds of glorious salad fixings or nutritious leafy greens like [pak choi](#), [chard](#) and [kale](#) -- all are wonderful ornamental edibles.

Container veggies need a good rich soil mix, and plenty of room for an ample root system with careful attention to regular watering and fertilizing. Their attractive foliage and colorful harvests are decorative as well as delicious!

Moveable feasts of color

Consider your container plants as design accessories of your "outdoor rooms"; move them around through the season and rearrange them as suits your fancy or their need for sun or shade all season and place them where you'll enjoy them most to enjoy a new flush of bloom or scent. I love to have blooming, leafy containers next to my patio and lawn chairs, on my picnic table and along my daily pathways to delight all my senses throughout the gardening season.

[Click here](#) for a list of Renee's Garden Varieties suitable for containers