

'Digging In'

Growing in Containers

ASK A MASTER GARDENER

2024/03/02

Janet Mackey & Lori Krikpatrick - Halton Master Gardeners

I'd like to grow some vegetables in containers on my balcony. What type of soil do I need and how do I get them off to a good start?

Container Checklist:

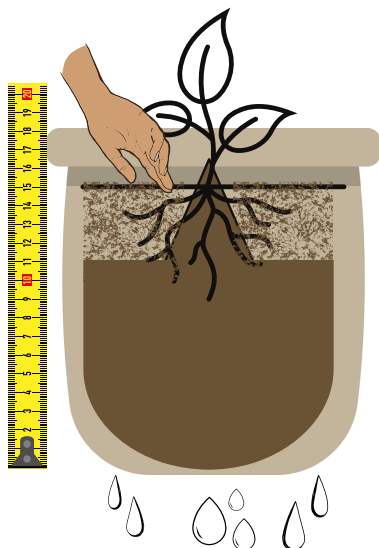
- What is the right size container needed for the mature plant?
- What material is your container made of?
- Are the weight and portability appropriate?
- Are there adequate drainage holes
- Sanitize (1 part bleach, 9 parts water - soak 10 minutes, Rinse well using dish soap and then clean water More Info: [Oklahoma State](#))

Before planting start with:

- a clean container with the drainage hole covered (window screen, coffee filter, newspaper)
- potting soil that is moist, and
- plants that have been well watered.

Planting Checklist:

- Fill container three-quarters full with moist potting soil.
- Form a cone of soil in the middle of the pot for the plant.
- Spread prepared roots around cone.
- Fill in potting soil around roots to the same level on the trunk or stems as in the original nursery container.
- Leave one inch of space between soil and the lip of your container. This will provide space for a water reservoir.
- Tamp by tapping pot or with fingers to settle.
- Water thoroughly. Occasionally water makes a channel through the container mix and leaves dry areas. Fill the channel with potting mix and water again.
- If you have a tray or saucer under your plant, be sure to empty it so the roots do not sit in excessive water.



Traditional Container Soils

Peat/Coir Container Soil

- 3 parts peat/coir
- 2 parts vermiculite/perlite
- 3 parts compost
- lime - if using peat
- granular organic fertilizer

Seed Starting

- 2 parts peat/coir
- 1 part vermiculite
- 1 part coarse sand
- lime if using peat

DIY Container Soils

- 1 part (by volume) homemade compost
- 1 part homemade leaf mold
- 1 part loam/sieved garden soil

- Equal parts soil
- compost
- worm castings

- Equal parts sifted garden soil
- sifted aged manure compost (wood-based bedding product)
- coarse sand
- "sprinkling" of equal parts lime, greensand, and rock phosphate

Pot Size



Extra Large

- up to 30 gallons
- potatoes



Large

- 8-10 gallons
- 12-16"
- tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, squash, cucumber



Medium

- 4-6 gallons
- 8-12"
- dwarf var. of tomatoes etc. lettuce, chard, large herbs



Small

- 1-3 gallons
- 4-6"
- herbs

Container Gardening/Potting Soil Resources:

- [A Review of Soilless Mediums](#) - Oklahoma State University Extension Details, including advantages and disadvantages of different types of soil mediums
- [Homemade Potting Soils](#) - University of Florida Extension - Various potting soil recipes for specific planting situations
- [Creating the Right Soil for Square Foot Gardens](#) - Do-It-Yourself.com - Recipe and calculations
- [Growing Potatoes in Containers](#) - University of New Hampshire Extension - Guide on container grown potatoes
- [Create Wildlife Habitat in Containers](#) - 'How to' with Ryan Godfrey World Wildlife Federation (Video)
- [Calculator for Raised Beds](#)
- [Container Guides](#) - Toronto Master Gardeners - a guide to growing all types of plants in containers
- [Recycle Your Used Potting Soil](#) - Laidback Gardener - Advice on re-use of potting soil
- [Potting Soil Recipes](#) - Savvy Gardening - 6 recipes for various planting types
- [DIY Potting Soil](#) - Savvy Gardening YOUTUBE
- [Tips for Purchasing Soil](#) - University of Maine YOUTUBE - Suggestions for how to improve your soil before purchasing as well as how to evaluate soil.
- [Soil Amendments & Fertilizers](#) - University of Maryland Extension - A list of a wide range of amendments, their advantages and considerations as well as fertilizer types and their nutrients
- [Soil testing through University of Guelph](#) - Send in soil samples to be tested