Top 10 Vegetables for Gardening in Containers

Growing vegetables in containers is a great way to maximize space, whether on a balcony, patio, or small garden. In addition to saving space, there are several advantages to growing vegetables in containers.

- They can be moved to safety or protected easier than plants in the ground in case of an early or late freeze/frost, or a summer hailstorm.
- Offers protection from browsing wildlife like deer, rabbits, gophers or voles.
- Allows more control over the quality of your soil when planting in containers vs planting in the ground.

Tips for Success:

The first rule is that the size of the pot must be appropriate for the plant you want to grow. If you want to grow root vegetables, such as carrots, you need a deep pot. Lettuce and other greens have shallow roots, so they are fine for smaller containers. Most plants will need a minimum of a 5-gallon container, larger is better. If you are growing vining plants, like cucumbers or tomatoes, that require trellising or other support you will want a large, heavy pot to support them and prevent them from being too top-heavy and tipping over.

The container material also plays a role. Clay pots are nice because they are heavier, and often more decorative, than plastic ones. But unglazed terra-cotta pots are porous and dry out faster, requiring more frequent watering. Of course, you can always plant in plastic pots, then place those pots into decorative clay or ceramic ones.

The color of the pot also matters. Black or dark colored pots will absorb more heat from the sun than lighter colored ones which may cause them to dry out faster. On the other hand, pots that absorb more heat can actually be beneficial to vegetables like tomatoes and peppers that require higher soil temperatures.

Regardless of which type container you choose, plants in containers need to be watered much more frequently than plants in the ground. In the heat of summer this may mean twice a day. This is another reason to go large on the pot size - the larger the pot the more soil it contains, so it will hold more water. They will also need to be fertilized regularly with a liquid, or water-soluble, fertilizer even if the potting mix has fertilizer in it. Remember when planting in containers, always use a quality potting soil.

McCord's Garden Center & Landscaping

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2720 McShane Drive, Monument, CO 80132

(719)375-3573 | www.mccordgardens.com

Here are the top 10 vegetables that thrive in containers:

1. Tomatoes:
   - Best Varieties: Both Cherry tomatoes like, Bush varieties like Mountain Princess.
   - Container Size: At least 5 gallons, deep pots.
   - Use a tomato cage or stake for support.
2. Peppers (Bell & Chili):
   - Best Varieties: Both Bell peppers like California Wonder, and Hot peppers like Jalapeno.
   - Container Size: 3-5 gallons.
   - Tip: Place in full sun for best growth and flavor.
3. Lettuce & Salad Greens:
   - Best Varieties: Romaine, Butterhead, Loose-leaf (e.g., Black Seeded Simpson).
   - Container Size: Shallow, wide containers (6-8 inches deep).
   - Tip: Cut outer leaves and let the plant keep growing (cut-and-come-again method).
4. Spinach:
   - Best Varieties: Most varieties will work. Olympia or Bloomsdale are high producers.
   - Container Size: 6-8 inches deep.
   - Tip: Grows well in cooler weather; place in partial shade.
5. Carrots:
   - Best Varieties: Shorter varieties like Little Finger.
   - Container Size: Deep pots (at least 12 inches).
   - Tip: Use loose, well-draining soil to avoid misshapen carrots.
6. Radishes:
   - Best Varieties: Cherry Belle or French Breakfast.
   - Container Size: 6 inches deep.
   - Tip: One of the fastest-growing veggies. Harvest in 3-4 weeks!
7. Cucumbers:
   - Best Varieties: Bush varieties like Spacemaster or Patio Snacker.
   - Container Size: 5 gallons, with a trellis.
   - Tip: Water consistently to prevent bitter cucumbers.
8. Green Beans:
   - Best Varieties: Both Bush beans like, Gold Rush or Contender and Pole beans like Kentucky Wonder or Scarlet Runner will work.
   - Container Size: 8-12 inches deep (Bush), 5-gallon pot with trellis (Pole).
   - Tip: Pick beans often to encourage continuous production.
9. Herbs:
   - Best Varieties: Basil, Cilantro, Thyme, Oregano, Mint, Rosemary.
   - Container Size: 6-8 inches deep.
   - Tip: Herbs like mint can spread aggressively and should be grown in separate pots.

10. Zucchini & Summer Squash:
    - Best Varieties: Bush varieties like Zucchini Cocozelle Summer Bush.
    - Container Size: 10+ gallon pot.
    - Tip: Give it plenty of space and fertilize regularly for high yields.