

KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good At It

“Small Space Vegetable Gardens”

March 1, 2022

Growing your own food can be both joyful and rewarding. If you're looking for a way to easily grow vegetables but don't have a ton of space or gardening experience, setting up a patio vegetable garden in pots may be perfect for you!

You may not be able to grow larger crops like corn but a wide variety of crops can be planted including lettuce, tomatoes, peppers carrots and many others. A more extensive list is described below.

Here are **8 key tips** to get your patio vegetable off to a good start and a good growing season:

First, choose the right container: Generally, choosing a container that is as large as possible is best because small containers dry out more quickly in our High Desert climate and will need extensive watering.

Almost any type of container can be used. Ten-inch pots are good for green onions, parsley and herbs. For plants with larger root systems, such as tomatoes, and peppers, five-gallon containers are best. Just make certain the container is also deep enough for plants with deeper roots. No matter what container type is used, adequate drainage is a must. Drain holes along the side about 1/2 inch from the bottom will help as well as elevating the pot off the surface of your patio.

Next, **select a sunny spot:** As a general guideline, most veggies need at least six to eight hours of daily sunlight. Veggies such as tomatoes, peppers, and beans will take as much sunlight as they can get. Greens and herbs may be fine with less sun. Don't forget to protect your plants from our afternoon winds.

Soil is important: Using regular garden soil is not the way to go for veggies in pots. 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. Fill your container completely with planting mix for optimal drainage. Research shows that it is best **not** to put anything (such as rocks or broken pot shards), in the bottom of your container. Layering materials impedes drainage and water actually moves best through a continuous column of soil mix.

A key tip for growing veggies in pots is **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. A dry fertilizer sprinkled on top of the soil offers a second-best alternative. If you use them, fertilize every three weeks. Read and follow the labels carefully.

Proper watering is also key: Proper watering is essential for any successful garden and growing vegetables in pots is no exception. If your vegetables are not well drained, the potting soil can become water-logged and plants will slowly die due to lack of oxygen. Water when the soil feels dry and until it runs out the drain holes. There are also self-watering planters available as well as testers to place in the pot to help you know when it is too dry. Avoid wetting the foliage of plants since wet leaves will encourage plant diseases.

Next, keep the plant tags or seed packet. The tags that the plants come with are crucial, especially if you aren't familiar the variety of plant. The tag may tell you how tall the plant will grow and how much water, light and air it will need. This will help you choose the correct container for the mature plant.

You will also need to know how to care for your plants:

- Place your potted vegetable plants in full sun for at least 6 hours with easy access to water.

- When your plants are small, they won't need to be watered as much. However, as plants increase in size and the temperature increases and the plants start to produce fruit, you will need to water daily.
- You will also need to fertilize as discussed earlier. Remember to follow the instructions on the label to determine how much and how frequently to apply.
- Check your plants daily and remove any pests or weeds. Harvest leafy greens such as kale or lettuce on a regular basis and reseed as needed. If plants fail (and they may), remove and replace them with other vegetables that fit the space and have time to grow and harvest in Central Oregon's short growing season.

Lastly, combining multiple plants in one pot can be a good way to save space and create a beautiful visual assortment. Something to consider is if the plants are compatible. Poor combinations are carrots and dill and tomatoes and potatoes. Some good companions are: tomatoes, basil and onions (it makes a great salad) and lettuce and herbs.

Every Plant is Different: Remember that every vegetable and herb is different, each with their own specific needs! Here are some suggestions:

- **Tomatoes:** Tomatoes need a support system to keep them upright. Using a wooden stake (gently tie limbs of plants to the stake) or a tomato cage can help. Peas would also benefit from tall supports in their container.
- **Carrots:** Carrots need a lot of room to grow, so make sure to use a container that's double the depth that the variety states that it needs. Unlike carrots, radishes don't need a large container.
- **Leafy greens:** Spinach and leaf lettuce are some greens that you can snip and harvest every couple of days. They also grow best in the spring or fall and can tolerate partial shade, making them perfect options if you don't have too much sunlight.
- **Zucchini squash & Cucumbers:** For these vegetables, buy the bush versus the sprawling vine varieties. They also grow full, large, and very fast; one plant can fill a 24-inch pot. These would also benefit from supports as well.

Information about dry fertilizers for pots: If using a time-release fertilizer note that it is mixed with the potting media at planting time. Many times, time-release fertilizer are pelleted with 14-14-14 formulation.

Watering tips: Not enough water can cause issues like poor root development, leaf curling, rot, and encourage insects to visit your plants. If you struggle with watering, a great idea may be to use a self-watering planter. This way the plants only take as much water as they need, and you only have to fill the reservoir every couple of days.

Combine Your Pots: Something to consider though, is whether the plants are compatible. Some examples of good companions are: tomatoes and basil together, or lettuce and herbs together. Check with the Extension Office for additional suggestions.

Check local seed catalogs for varieties of vegetables that thrive in containers. Usually, a small pot is pictured after the variety name such as:

Tomatoes -



Lizzano (F1) 65 days. One of the early-maturing cherry tomatoes...

This month the Master Gardeners will be offering online classes to help you Grow Vegetables in Central Oregon. In April, there will be two webinars every Saturday with different topics each week. More information is on our website: www.gocomga.com. Click on the Upcoming Classes and Events tab on the orange bar.

For answers to all your gardening questions, please visit our website or call the Master Gardeners at 541-548-6088. This has been Gardening: Get Good At It on KPOV's *The Point*.

Resources:

No Room for Veggies? Pot Up Your Plants <https://today.oregonstate.edu/news/no-room-vegetables-pot-your-plants>

Vegetable Gardening in Containers <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/files/2013/09/EHT-062.pdf>

Growing Vegetables in Containers <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/growing-vegetables-containers/>