



**WINDMILL**  
*Gardens*

## Container Gardening

### Why grow in containers?

- Containers can be moved into the sun or shade as needed.
- Tender plants can be moved into a protected area during cold weather.
- You don't have to worry about your ground soil.
- You can lengthen your growing season because the soil will heat up faster.
- You can raise the crops up high enough so you don't have to bend over to tend your crops.
- You can have your garden on your patio.
- Plants can be taken with you when you move.
- Bare or dull areas can be improved.
  - Eyesores can be hidden.

### Choosing the right container for your needs.

- Almost anything can be used as a container. Plastic buckets, lard cans, boxes, specialty pots, wheel barrels, whiskey barrels, wagons, and wooden frames can be used as containers. Make sure you have a drain hole or equivalent.
- Choose the right size container for your plant/plants. Make sure it is large enough to give room for the plants to grow, but small enough to handle and easier to move. If you are potting up use a container just slightly larger than the root ball. With large plants the first container used may be the last container used. A container that can be taken apart is useful for a plant that has to be root pruned.
- If you have a container with decorative sides, choose upright plants so the sides are not covered. For a plain container, have some plants that dangle to cover the sides.

- Make containers no larger than necessary so they won't be too unwieldy and hard to move. Consider using a platform with wheels or a hand truck to move your large plants.
- For vegetable gardens the test gardeners have settled on three types of containers.
  - 23" x 36" x 8" deep for carrots, onions, beets, turnips, kohlrabi and so on.
  - 12" x 48" x 8" deep for pole beans, cucumber, peas, cantaloupe, etc.
  - Single 4 or 5 gallon buckets for peppers, tomatoes, etc.
  - Specialty containers can be used for strawberries, herbs.
  - Consider using the new plastic bag type containers for your annual plants.

### Soil Mix

The ideal soil mix holds water but never gets soggy. After a good soaking, a fistful of soil, when squeezed and released should hold its shape, it should not drip when squeezed. Water should soak in and no sit on the top of the soil. Add some organic material or sandy loam to help retain moisture. Try gel granules for water retention. Soil-less compost mix works well, but use the soil mix that works best for your plant. You should have well draining sandy soil for cactus and moisture retaining soil (organic) for vegetables. Garden stores have a variety of soils.

### Fertilizing

The goal of fertilization is intelligent replacement of soil nutrients. Container plants need regular fertilization because the watering washes the fertilizer out of the soil. Most vegetables need a lot of fertilizer.

- Types of fertilizer:
  - Dry fertilizers** are the majority sold. You sprinkle or spread them into the soil around the plants. You rake, scratch or dig them into the subsurface.
  - Liquid fertilizers** are easy to use, especially on container plants. There is no risk of burning a plant as long as you follow label directions for dilution. The nutrients are available to the roots immediately. Liquids must be reapplied more often. They cost more than dry fertilizers. Growers of container plants often use

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liquid fertilizers at half the strength and twice the frequency recommended so that plants receive a steadier supply of nutrients. **Organic fertilizer** simply means that the nutrients contained in the product are derived solely from the remains, part of the remains, or a by-product of a once living organism. Organic fertilizer is usually high in just one of the three major nutrients and is low in the other two. The potential drawback is that they may not release enough of their principal nutrients at a time to give the plant what it needs for best growth.

**Stick, stakes and tablets** yield nutrients gradually, sometimes over a year or two.

**Slow release fertilizers** in tablet, cones and granular forms work well and will feed the plants for months. Some, like Osmocote need temperatures of 65+ to release.

### What do the Numbers Mean?

A complete fertilizer contains (N)nitrogen, (P) phosphorus and (K) potassium.

- (N) for the green – all plants use nitrogen
- (P) for shallow rooting plants – think blooms and fruits
- (K) also for shallow rooting plants – blooms, roots and fruits

The number right under the name is the ratio to each other and the percentages in the mix. For example; without looking at the fine print, 10-8-6 stands for 10% total nitrogen, 8% phosphate and 6% potash. The higher the numbers the stronger or more concentrated the fertilizer. 22-12-6 is twice as concentrated as 11-6-3.

The plants appearance will usually let you know if you have a nutrient problem. Leaves should be a medium green depending on the usual appearance of course. Pale leaves and weak stems usually suggest a lack of nitrogen. Yellow in between the veins of the leaves, oldest leaves worst, might be a manganese shortage. Lime haters are most affected. Iron shortage effects lime hating plants. The leaves have large yellow areas. Young leaves are worst. Brown, dry looking leaves with crisp edges could be from over feeding. Wash out extra fertilizer by a heavy watering or leaching.

### Watering

Container grown plants should never be allowed to wilt nor should they stand in soggy soil. Check the moisture in your soil occasionally by digging

down an inch or two. Let the water run into the containers slowly so the soil will absorb moisture. Consider putting in a drop watering system. They work great in containers. Mulching will help keep the soil moist and cool. It will also hold down the weeds. Use moisture penetrating mulch such as straw, bark, leaves, paper, etc.