VEGETABLE CONTAINER GARDENING

Vegetable container gardening can bring joy and bounty. The simple pleasure of biting into a tomato still warm from the sun, picked and eaten on the spot, is almost unbeatable. You can grow just about any vegetable in a container garden and you can also save serious bucks by growing your own vegetable container gardens.

However, vegetable container gardening can be a frustrating and expensive endeavor if your plants don't thrive and produce. The following list of basic tips apply to most vegetables, and will help you and your plants get off to a good start.

Sun - Most vegetables need full sun – that means at least six hours of direct sunlight a day. It is easy to overestimate how much sun an area really gets, so either take out your watch and time how long the sun hits the spot where you want to put your vegetable container garden, or use a sun calculator to get an accurate, not optimistic assessment.

Water – Growing vegetables need water - lots of it. However, you don't want to drown your plants. The goal is to keep your soil moist but not wet. To figure out if your plants need water, stick your finger down into the soil, about an inch, or up to your first knuckle. If the soil feels dry, add water, and if you're not sure, wait and check later in the day. At the height of summer, you probably will have to water at least once, sometimes twice, a day. Proper watering may be the single most important and hardest part of vegetable container gardening.

Heat – If you live in a really hot zone you may have to shade your plants in the middle of the day in order not to fry them. Also, it's best not to use metal containers or dark colored plastics or ceramics, because they can heat up and cook your plant's roots.

On the flip side, many vegetables don't like cold soil, so make sure not to put your vegetable container gardens outside full-time, until you know the temperatures are warm enough. For many plants the soil needs to be at least 60°F. Using a meat thermometer is a good way to find out the temperature of your soil. Always make sure to harden off your plants before you put them outside.

Soil - Quality potting soil is really important for vegetables. Don't use soil from your garden, because it will compact in your container and won't drain water properly. Also, one of the reasons to garden in containers is so you won't have to deal with weeds. Chances are pretty good that if you use garden soil, you will be importing weeds into your container. I use organic potting soil because studies have shown that there are many benefits to growing produce organically, including better taste and a higher percentage of antioxidents and phytochemicals.

Fertilizer - Plants need food to thrive, and their food is fertilizer. If your soil doesn't have fertilizer already mixed in, you'll want to add fertilizer. I use an organic granular fertilizer and mix it into my containers from top to bottom. Every couple of weeks I will add diluted liquid fish emulsion or liquid seaweed to give them the nutrition they need. Another great way to add fertilizer during the growing season is to make or buy compost tea.

Drainage - Drainage is key to keep plants from drowning. You want your pot or container to let excess water out of the bottom, so your plants won't sit in water or soggy soil. Make sure your container has one large hole or several smaller ones. You can usually drill holes if the drainage is insufficient.
Containers – Choosing a container can be daunting. You can use almost anything for a garden planter as long as it is big enough and has good drainage. Keep in mind though, that the larger your container, the easier it will be to maintain. The more soil a container can hold the more moisture it will retain. I don't bother with containers that are smaller than 12" and I am much happier if they are at least 18". Bigger, really is better here.
I particularly love wooden containers for growing vegetables. I like the way they look and you can get really good-sized containers that aren't too expensive, or you can make your own. Mine are cedar and hopefully will last just about as long as I do.

Growing vegetables in self-watering containers works wonderfully well…most of the time. Problems arise when you get lots of rain. Unless you have a container where excess water can be easily drained, or that has an overflow hole, your plants can end up drowning. That said, most of the time self-watering containers do a fantastic job of providing optimal water conditions. They can also be a practical solution for people who can't water every day.

Plastic or glazed ceramic containers are fine too. You can even use terracotta, but it is harder to keep your plants moist, because the clay tends to suck the water out of the soil. To help solve this problem, put a dish under your ceramic pot and fill it with water.

For an inexpensive container try a five-gallon, plastic bucket from the hardware store, or make an unusual container from something you have around your house, like an old laundry basket or a toy bin. As long as it's big enough and has good drainage, you can really use anything.
Seeds or Seedlings – You can start your veggies from seed or buy seedlings. There are some significant advantages and disadvantages to each. Starting your own seeds is much less expensive than buying seedlings, after some startup costs. If you start your own seeds can grow hard to find varieties and can also grow your seedlings organically. However, starting seeds isn't for everyone. You absolutely cannot let them dry out or they're toast. Conversely, if you give them too much water, they keel over dead. To avoid this, you can make a self-watering seed starter. There are also some common seed starting mistakes to avoid. To figure out if seed starting is for you, try asking yourself six questions before you start seeds.

Easy Vegetables: The following is a list of veggies that are easy to grow.

- Peas
- Potatoes
- Tomatoes
- Carrots
- Radishes
- Cucumbers
- Eggplant
- Summer or zucchini squash

Resource:
http://containergardening.about.com/od/vegetablesandherbs/a/ContainerVeggie.htm