

# Great Gardens in Small Spaces

## Washington County Master Gardener™ Association



### Getting Started with Container Gardening

Containers can be small or large, indoors or outdoors, for ornamental or edible plants.

**Right Place** –yard, balcony, deck, porch, or patio can all be good places for plants in containers

- Select a location that fits the sun/light needs of your plant.
- Can you move the planter easily to follow the sun?
  - ◇ For large pots, a planter caddy with wheels can allow easy movement.
  - ◇ Most vegetables need at least 6 hours of sun daily to produce edible results.

**Right Plant** – plants that will be happy in your container and in the location you’ve chosen.

- Check the plant label carefully to find a plant that can thrive in the size of container and the place you will put it
- This may mean selecting a dwarf or smaller variety, or planting one plant per container, rather than several.
- Ornamental plants for decorative containers
  - ◇ Select plants that are already nearly full-size for a more finished look
  - ◇ Fill bare spaces in newly planted perennial containers with seasonal annuals to provide year-round visual interest
- Edible plants for containers
  - ◇ Many vegetable varieties have been developed for containers. Look for name clues, such as “Baby,” “Little,” or “Patio.”
  - ◇ Select vegetables/fruits that are young plants, rather than seeds, for an earlier harvest; for example, tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers.
- Some edible plants are easier grown from seed; for example, lettuce or other greens, peas, carrots, beets, and radishes.



**Right Container** – match the plant you want with the size and shape of a container that fits in your space

- Anything can be a container for edible and ornamental plants, teapots, wooden boxes, etc. as well as the usual planters.

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- Determine the size of container(s) you will use.
  - ◇ Small (3-4") pots of herbs or succulents may be put on a windowsill.
  - ◇ Medium (12-16") pots of flowers, greenery, or small/dwarf vegetables, can go on a porch, or balcony or even as a border in the yard.
  - ◇ Large (20" or larger) containers may be used to grow a smaller flowering perennial shrub, some butterfly-attracting flowers, greens, or many desirable vegetables.

- Using a container –

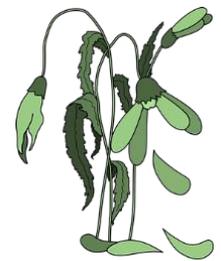
- ◇ Make sure that your container has drain holes in the bottom – if it doesn't, poke or drill holes in the bottom to drain any excess water.
- ◇ Place a coffee filter over the pot hole if desired, to prevent loss of soil.
- ◇ Adding gravel or other material does not assist with drainage and is no longer recommended.
- ◇ Fill your container with a growing medium that is formulated for a container. Ground soil may contain too much clay for adequate drainage in a container.



- A large container is needed for multiple plants of the same or similar needs.
- Container plants generally can be spaced more closely than you would plant them in the ground.
- Plants in a container may also have a shorter life-span than plants in the ground, especially perennial shrubs.

### Right Care – tending to your containers for happy plants

- Water: Plants in containers need more frequent watering than plants in the ground.
  - ◇ Check the plant label to see the moisture requirements of your plant.
  - ◇ Some containers, especially hanging planters need water twice a day if very hot.
  - ◇ Smaller containers need water more often than larger ones;
  - ◇ Clay pots dry out faster than plastic or ceramic;
  - ◇ More drain holes may mean quicker drying.
- Check the soil to determine if the plant needs water. Stick your finger in the soil; if the top 2" of soil are dry, it's time to water. If the soil feels damp to your finger, wait another day.
- Fertilizer:
  - ◇ Use vegetable fertilizer once or twice during the growing season for edible plants.
  - ◇ Decorative flower planters can benefit from a 'bloom' fertilizer, especially in a weak solution applied weekly.



### Right Help – sources for more information about growing plants in containers

- Master Gardeners™ <https://bit.ly/MetroMG>
- Container Planting <https://bit.ly/plantingcontainers>
- Container Gardening <https://bit.ly/greencontainers>
- Gardening in Containers <https://bit.ly/container4plants>