

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mghelpline@masshort.org.

Growing Edibles in Containers

You really CAN grow vegetables on your balcony, deck or rooftop!

Full size vegetable plants can be grown in containers as long as they are provided with enough space for adequate root development. Grow each vegetable in a separate pot, or combine them for an attractive mixed planting, as you would flowers and foliage. Just be sure to provide sufficient depth for the deepest growing roots: 16-18 inches for beans, summer squash, peppers, eggplant, tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers; 12-14" or more for carrots and beets, 10-12" for onions.

All peas, spinach, radish, and lettuce can be started in early spring, removed after harvest, and replaced with a summer crop. Seed potatoes/tubers and carrot seed are planted early to mid-spring; onion seedlings and beet seed in mid-spring. Others mentioned are summer crops, set out or planted in late spring. Peas, pole beans and tomatoes can be trellised or staked in the pot to provide support. For an early season treat plant sugar snap peas in late March. Harvest in June. Enjoy them picked right off the plant!

SUN

Your pot or planter should receive at least 6-8 hours of sun (12 hours is even better). Some of the leafy greens, like lettuces, can get by with 4-6 hours.

THE CONTAINER

Vegetables can be grown in any type of container that has not been painted or finished with a toxic coating (i.e.: no old-style wood preservatives). Try a wooden box lined with landscape fabric, a large used tree pot, a colorful glazed pot, or a galvanized metal tub. Unglazed clay pots are fine, but dry out more quickly. Bigger is better; larger pots hold moisture longer. Be sure your container has adequate drainage holes, so your plants do not drown

when overwatered, either by you or the rains. A coffee filter or piece of screening to cover the drain holes will prevent soil from washing out. Clean the pot well if it has been used, rinse with a 10% bleach solution to kill off any diseases, then rinse again with clear water. (Dump the old pot's used potting mix into the compost pile.)

SOIL AND FERTILIZER

Fill your container to within 1 or 2 inches of the rim with a high quality fresh potting mix. Garden soil or "topsoil" is too heavy for use in pots. Use a fertilizer balanced for growing vegetables to be certain your plants get adequate nutrients. Follow the package directions. Organic fertilizers are generally preferred for vegetable growing. Liquid and granular ones can both be found on nursery shelves.

WATER

Water the filled container well and let it sit for a day to dampen the mix thoroughly and allow it to settle. Follow seed packet directions for planting. Keep seeds well watered. Do not allow the soil to dry out, especially while plants are seedlings. Irregular watering contributes to stressed plants that may fail to thrive. Most pots will need to be watered daily, especially if they are full with lush growth.

THE PLANTS

Plant seeds according to seed packet instructions. Peas, spinach, lettuce, radish, Swiss chard, beans, carrots, cucumbers and squash are best seeded directly into the pot. Plant tiny seeds like lettuce, radish and carrots thinly. Thinning these after sprouting is tedious work. Peppers, eggplant and tomatoes can be started early indoors or purchased as plants. Plant these out in late May. Allow enough width for root systems to fully develop, and underground plants like beets, carrots, radish and onions to grow to full size without being crowded.

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>