

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET

Have gardening questions? Contact the **Master Gardener Help Line.**

Two locations / two ways to contact us:

At *Mass Hort, Wellesley*: mghelpline@masshort.org, 617-933-4929

At *Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston*: hortline@towerhillbg.org, 608-869-6111 x104

Please visit our web site for Help Line open hours <http://massmastergardeners.org/what-i-do/>



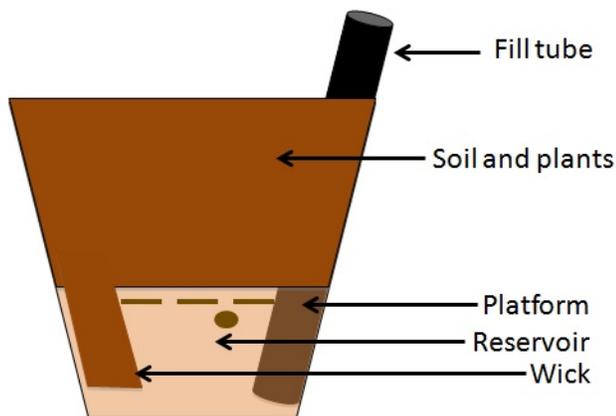
Self-Watering Containers

In some situations you may want to use containers as part of your garden. Containers have many advantages: you can put a garden wherever you want it; soil can be customized to the needs of your plants; and containers can be attractive additions to your landscaping. However, containers often need to be watered daily, especially in the hot summer months. Self-watering containers can reduce that extra effort.

ANATOMY OF A SELF-WATERING CONTAINER

While self-watering containers come in many sizes, shapes, and designs, they all share some key elements:

- A reservoir of water
- A “wick” (usually of soil or fabric) to move water from the reservoir to the planting area
- A platform or shelf above the reservoir to create an air gap and keep plant roots from being submerged



Once a container is set up, the “wick” pulls water from the reservoir and moves it into the soil, the same way a sponge becomes completely saturated if you place one end into a glass of water. As plants in the container take water out of the soil, the wicking action replaces it from the reservoir. All the gardener needs to do is to keep the reservoir filled.

CONTAINER CONSIDERATIONS

When selecting a self-watering container, keep these points in mind:

- The location where the container will be kept
- The size and water needs of the plants you will be growing in the container
- Ease of accessing the container for refilling the reservoir
- The volume the reservoir will hold

The larger your container’s reservoir, the less often you will need to refill it:

- A self-watering container with a half-gallon reservoir, planted in ornamentals that don’t need a lot of water, may only need to be refilled once a week.
- A self-watering container with a two-gallon reservoir, supporting two tomato plants in full production, may need to be refilled every few days.

BUILD-IT-YOURSELF

If you don’t find an off-the-shelf self-watering container that suits your needs, you may want to make your own. Many gardening supply companies sell converter kits that let you turn an existing planter – even a decorative one – into a self-watering container.

If you are more concerned about function than appearance, you can build your own self-watering containers out of five gallon buckets or even storage bins – directions can be found on the web by searching “homemade self-watering container” or “earthtainer.”

Bear in mind that not all plants are suitable for self-watering containers. One example is potatoes, which won’t thrive in an environment with constant moisture. But many of our most common ornamentals and vegetables will do well in self-watering containers – and using them can reward you with more time to enjoy your garden!

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.

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