

KINGMAN IS GROWING! Column

Growing Vegetables in Containers

Linda Reddick, Kingman Area Master Gardener

Major considerations for growing vegetables in containers

How Much Sun?

Most vegetables need at least 6 hours of sunlight a day. Leafy vegetables such as lettuce, onions, carrots, and beets will do ok in partial shade. But plants that bear fruit like tomatoes, squash, peppers need at least 6 hours of sun a day. However, the sun can also cause the roots of most vegetables to become too hot when planted in containers. Even with ample water the feeder roots will fry and rot, causing plant death. To correct this simply place a sun reflective screen (like the ones for car windows) around the container. Thick wood also helps reduce heat, and be aware that dark colored containers will absorb more heat than light colored containers.

What Type of Container

Almost any container will do well as long as it has good drainage. Smaller containers dry out very quickly. The smallest for outdoor use is probably 8 to 12 inches in diameter. If you use recycled containers, scrub them well with a solution of 9 parts water to one part bleach, and rinse them before use. Actually this is a good practice to use before planting in any container. If containers are porous (clay, wood, cement) soak them well in water before filling so they won't act like sponges and pull all the water from your soil.

How deep should the container be? How far apart to plant?

Vegetable	Plant Spacing	Soil Depth
Beets	3" apart	9" to 12"
Leaf Lettuce	6" apart	9" to 12"
Onions	3" apart	9" to 12"
Radishes	1" to 2" apart	9" to 12"
Spinach	5" apart	9" to 12"
Swiss Chard	6" apart	9" to 12"
Carrots (short)	2" apart	9" to 18"

Broccoli	12" apart	12" to 14"
Cabbage	12" apart	12" to 14"
Cauliflower	12" apart	12" to 14"
Egg Plant	12" apart	14" to 16"
Peas	3" apart	14" to 16"
Peppers	12" apart	14" to 16"
Beans	5" apart	16" to 18"
Cucumbers	12" apart	16" to 18"
Potatoes	6" apart	16" to 18"
Summer Squash	18" apart	16" to 18"
Tomatoes (cherry)	18" apart	16" to 18"
Zucchini	18" apart	16" to 18"

Leafy vegetables and herbs don't need as much room, but use a pot at least 9 inches deep so you do not have to water so often. Remember, the bigger the pot, the bigger the yield. An additional 2 inches in depth can double your harvest.

Preparation of Soil

Do not use garden soil! It may contain diseases and fungi and is usually very heavy and slow to drain. Purchase a high quality soil mix that is sterilized, able to absorb and retain moisture, drain adequately, and has nutrients. Believe me, not all potting mixes are created equally.

Fertilizing: A Must

Confined root systems demand frequent light fertilizing through-out the growing season. Nutrients are leached from the soil with every watering and need to be replenished. Two to four weeks after planting begin to apply a water soluble fertilizer mixed half strength. Continue to apply fertilizer every two weeks. A little is good, a lot is NOT better.

Watering Requirements

All containers dry out quickly, watering requirements will vary according to the season, type of container, soil mixture and exposure. To be safe check your containers daily. Stick your finger into the top inch of soil. If it feels damp there is no need to water. If it feels dry slowly water the container until some runs out the bottom of the container. In mid summer and windy days this may become a daily job. Try never to put the plants to bed with wet leaves; it could encourage disease organisms to develop. The best time to water is in the early morning.

What Should I Plant

To get the most out of your limited space, choose high yielding and dwarf varieties with moderate to standard sized fruit. Stay away from large or giant varieties. Look for dwarf, bush type or some seed packages even indicate "for containers". For better yield, provide support for vining or trailing crops, using a trellis or stakes. Insert the

supports when you first plant the seeds or transplants so that you do not damage the roots by adding them later.

For more information on **alternative gardening**; i.e. self-water containers, up-side-down growing and more, attend the FREE workshop **Saturday, April 4th** sponsored by The University of Arizona Mohave County Cooperative Extension and Kingman Area Master Gardeners. Seating is limited; call the University of Arizona Mohave County Cooperative Extension for more information and reservations, 928-753-3788.

Reference: U.C. Davis garden article.

**CONTACT: VICKI COOMBS
ADMINISTRATIVE ASST
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
MOHAVE COUNTY
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
101 E BEALE ST STE A
KINGMAN AZ 86401-5808
928 753-3788/928 753-1665 (FAX)
mohavece@cals.arizona.edu**

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