

Eat Better from Your Garden



When we eat better, we also feel and look better. Fruits and vegetables taste great, are low-calorie sources of fiber, vitamins, and minerals, and give you fuel for your active day. They also help lower your risk of obesity and other serious health problems. You can be better today by eating a rainbow of color and flavor from fresh, frozen, canned, and even dried fruits and vegetables.

Have you ever considered growing your own veggies? Not only is gardening at home a great way to get more fresh veggies into your daily snacks and meals, it is a fun physical activity that the whole family can do together. Starting a garden is easier than you might think.

Grow in Containers

Container gardening allows you to grow produce where space is limited, and also provides an opportunity to move plants from one place to another. You can use many different household items as containers for your garden, just be sure that there are holes in the items so that excess water can drain out (you can drill holes if necessary).

When considering containers to use, let your imagination soar – you can use flower pots, but even hanging baskets, empty coffee cans, old colanders, plastic milk jugs cut in half, window boxes, plastic storage tubs, or even an old chest of drawers will work. Remember, you will need to drill holes into containers that do not have any.



Choosing the Best Container

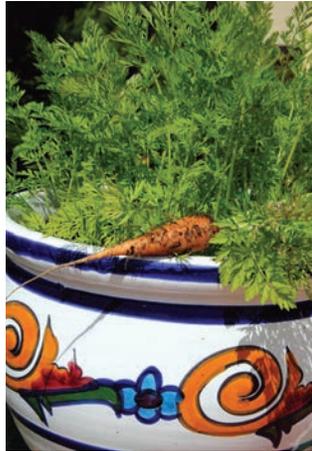
Determine the size of your container based on what you want to grow. Plants like herbs and lettuce only need 6-8 inches of depth. Carrots, bell peppers, and spinach need 8-9 inches of soil to grow. Beans, cucumbers, or tomatoes will need at least 16 inches for healthy roots.



Which Vegetables to Plant

Vegetables that work best in containers include lettuce, carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, green beans, spinach, radishes, bell peppers, and squash. Herbs also grow well in containers and can be grouped together in one large pot.

You can grow vegetables from seeds, or use starter plants. Vegetables like lettuce, beets, radishes and peas grow easily from seeds. However, some plants such as tomatoes, cucumbers, and zucchini are better planted in the form of small starter plants as they take longer to germinate from seed.



Soil and Fertilizer

To ensure your plants grow well, use potting soil rather than topsoil from the ground. Unlike topsoil, potting mix contains a balance of nutrients that are ideal for plants. It is also lightweight and allows air to get to the roots of the plants to help them grow. For the best growth, fertilize the plants regularly. Use fish emulsion or seaweed fertilizers that are free of chemicals.



How to Plant

In addition to the container and soil, you also need a trowel (small shovel used to dig a hole), either seeds or small seedlings, and water. Follow these instructions:

1. Add about 1-2 inches of large pebbles to the bottom of the container to assist with drainage.
2. Add potting soil to the container so it is about two-thirds full.
3. Find out how much room your plant will need when it is fully grown and add either the seeds or seedlings to the container far enough apart to make sure they will have enough room when fully developed.
4. Cover the seeds or seedlings with about 1-2 inches of additional potting soil.
5. Water thoroughly.

How Much Sun

Where to place your containers depends upon how much sunlight the specific type of plant needs to grow. Most vegetables and herbs thrive with six or more hours of direct sunlight each day, but some, such as leafy greens and herbs, grow best in just four hours of sunlight daily.



Where to Grow

Containers can be placed in most any space that is available. They can sit on a deck or porch, or in small areas of your yard. You can even place containers in a sunny spot near a window inside your home. If you choose to plant in the ground, consider using raised beds so the plants do not get trampled when the kids are playing.

When to Water

Plants growing in containers tend to dry and wilt more quickly than plants in the ground. But be careful about how much or how little you water them. It is unhealthy for plants to sit in too much water as it may cause the roots to rot. Check the soil by feeling about an inch from the top. If it is dry, it is time to water. Or if you begin to see the first sign of wilting, be sure to water. Water the soil until you see water flowing from the drainage holes.



Enjoy Your Harvest

Once your vegetables are ready for harvest, enjoy them right away. They are fresh and delicious directly from the garden; just wash them and start snacking. You can also use them in your favorite dishes. You can find many great recipes to use by visiting CaChampionsForChange.net.

If your plants produce too much at one time for you to use, consider freezing or canning them for later use. Organize a garden swap with neighbors to share everyone's extras and benefit from the variety of the different bounties of fruits and vegetables.

