

# **How to Plant a Container**

## **Torrance Memorial Learning Garden**

Instructor: Judi Gerber

### **Size and Type of Container**

Pots and planters come in a wide range of shapes, sizes, materials, and styles. Almost any everyday container can be modified for planting including bowls, baskets, and barrels.

- When choosing a size keep in mind what plant/plants you want to grow in it. Think about the size and shape of a plant's root system because a root bound plant will dry out rapidly and will not grow well. Also, think about how rapidly it grows. This will determine how large and how deep the container should be.
- Large containers hold more soil, stay moist longer, and are less subject to rapid temperature fluctuations. Conversely, small hanging baskets can dry out quickly.
- Light colored-containers keep the soil cooler than dark containers.
- The maximum size (or weight) of a container is limited by how much room you have, what will support it, and whether or not you plan to move it in and out of the sun or shade.

### **Container Materials**

Each type of container has advantages and disadvantages:

- Clay or terra-cotta containers are attractive but breakable and are easily damaged by freezing and thawing.
- Cast concrete is long lasting and comes in a range of sizes and styles. Plain concrete is heavy, but concrete with perlite or vermiculite or concrete and fiberglass blends are much lighter.
- Plastic and fiberglass are lightweight, relatively inexpensive and available in many sizes and shapes. Choose sturdy and somewhat flexible pots. Avoid thin, stiff pots; they become brittle with cold or age.
- Wood is natural looking and protects roots from rapid temperature swings. Choose a naturally rot-resistant wood like cedar or locust, or use pine treated with a nontoxic preservative. Molded wood-fiber containers are sturdy and inexpensive.

### **Drainage and Watering**

While anything will work, the only necessity is drainage holes. They are essential because without drainage, soil will become waterlogged and your plants will probably die.

- The size of the holes is not as important as making sure there are enough to let excess water drain out.
- It is not necessary to cover the holes with potshards or gravel. It doesn't improve drainage and potshards may actually block the holes.

- To prevent soil from washing out, put a layer of paper towels, coffee filters, or newspaper over the holes before you add the soil.
- If you have a container without holes that you absolutely feel you must use, consider using it as a cover to hide a plain pot that does have holes.
- Containers need more water than plants in the ground and the smaller the container, the quicker it dries out. Check daily, feeling down about an inch to see if soil is moist or not.
- Water container plants thoroughly. How often depends on many factors including weather, plant size and pot size.
- Don't let soil in containers dry out completely since it is hard to re-wet it.
- You can add a polymer that holds large amounts of water. They will improve water availability without making the soil soggy. While not naturally occurring substances, they are inert and have no toxic breakdown products.

### **Soil**

- Use potting soil, not garden soil because you need a fast draining, yet moisture-retaining soil with a loose structure so roots can grow easily. Garden soil is too dense for container use; it forms a solid mass that roots can't penetrate easily. Also, your garden soil can have disease, pests, etc.
- When adding soil to your container, don't fill pots level to the top with soil but leave space for watering. At minimum, leave at least an inch from the top for watering. Leave a 2-inch space between the top of the soil and the top of the container if you would like to be able to add a half-inch layer of mulch later.

### **Fertilizing**

- Because frequent watering causes nutrients to leach out of the soil, container plants need frequent feeding/fertilizing.
- Fertilize them by watering with diluted fish emulsion, seaweed extract or compost tea. Or foliar-feed them by spraying the leaves with a doubly diluted preparation of these solutions.
- Start by feeding once every two weeks; adjust the frequency depending on the plants' response.

**Local Gardening Sources**  
**Torrance Memorial Learning Garden**  
Instructor: Judi Gerber

Deep Roots Garden Center – 207 N. Sepulveda, Manhattan Beach, (310) 310-376-0567.  
Small nursery (formerly Annie's) <https://www.deep-roots.net/gardencenter/>

Armstrong Garden Center – 25225 Crenshaw Blvd., Torrance, (310) 326-1892. Lots of  
ornamentals, and gifts. <https://www.armstronggarden.com>

Elwood Nursery – 770 Silver Spur Road, Rolling Hills Estates, (310) 377-4777.  
Ornamentals, lots of fertilizer choices, house and gift plants.

Hawthorne Nursery - 4519 W. El Segundo Blvd., Hawthorne, (310) 676-8242.  
Perennials, vines, and subtropicals.

International Garden Center – 155 N. Sepulveda Blvd., El Segundo, (310) 615-0353.  
Ornamentals, roses, and gift items. <https://igardencenter.com/>

Laurel's Heirloom Tomato Plants – (organic) Has 130 varieties of tomatoes, while she is  
located locally, she has only mail order available, no store, but does have a few open  
weekends. Her website is [www.heirloomtomatoplants.com](http://www.heirloomtomatoplants.com). Call (310) 534-8611 to order.

Marina del Rey Garden Center – 13198 Mindanao Way, Marina del Rey, (310) 823-5956  
Lots of pottery, statues and fountains, perennials, roses, and California native plants.  
<http://www.marinagardencenter.com/>

MB Nursery – 20300 S. Figueroa St., Carson, (310) 527-7750, Wholesale growers that  
are open to the public. Groundcovers, trees, shrubs, vines, topiaries, Southland sod,  
pottery, fountains.

Moneta Nursery – 13633 Vermont Ave., Gardena, (310) 324-4077. Wide selection of  
roses, fruit trees, annuals, perennials, herbs, pottery, fountains, and nursery stock.  
<https://www.monetanurserygardena.com/>

Sunflower Farms – 17609 S. Western Ave., Torrance, (310) 527-8371. General  
ornamentals, roses, and garden ornamentals. <https://sunflowerfarmsnursery.com/nursery/>

## Where to Buy Edibles

### Local Nurseries:

The most common edibles have become easier to find at most garden centers and even hardware stores like Ace or Lowe's. However, some nurseries have better plants in general including:

Armstrong Garden Center, 25225 Crenshaw, Torrance, (310) 326-1892  
Elwood Nursery, 770 Silver Spur Road, Rolling Hills Estates, (310) 377-4777  
International Garden Center, 155 N. Sepulveda, El Segundo, (310) 615-0353  
Moneta Nursery, 13633 South Vermont, Gardena, (310) 324-4077

### Organic/Heirloom Mail Order/Internet Seed Sources:

Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, <http://www.rareseeds.com/>  
Botanical Interest: <https://www.botanicalinterests.com/> also available at Armstrong Nursery  
High Mowing Organic Seeds, <http://www.highmowingseeds.com/>  
Nichols Garden Center, [www.nicholsgardennursery.com](http://www.nicholsgardennursery.com) (800) 422-3985  
Renee's Garden, [www.reneesgarden.com](http://www.reneesgarden.com), (888) 880-7228, also available at Armstrong Nursery  
Seeds of Change, <http://www.seedsofchange.com/>  
Territorial Seed Company, [www.territorialseed.com](http://www.territorialseed.com), (800) 626-0866

## Bibliography

### Magazines:

*Sunset* – Monthly magazine that features articles on edibles, ornamentals, garden designs, and cooking.

### Books:

*The Gardener's Guide to Growing Organic Food*, Tanya L.K. Denckia, Storey Publishing (2003).

Rodale Books: *Rodale's All-New Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening*, Rodale, (2018); *Rodale's The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Natural Insect and Disease Control*, Rodale, (2010).

*The Vegetable Gardener's Bible*, Edward C. Smith, Storey Publishing, (2009).

Sunset Books: *Sunset Western Garden Book of Edibles*, Sunset (2009); *Sunset Western Garden Book*, Sunset, (2012); *Sunset Vegetable Gardening*, Sunset, (1998).

## **Torrance Memorial Medical Center Learning Garden Small Space Food Gardens**

Instructor: Judi Gerber

If you can provide three basics: sun, water and great soil, you can vegetable garden regardless of how much space you have.

**Sun:** Vegetables need at least six or more hours of sun each day. Without sun, the fruits will not ripen and the plants will be stressed. There are a few crops that can survive in light shade, lettuce and other greens, broccoli and cole crops, but if you can't provide sun, you might want to reconsider having a vegetable garden.

**Water:** Vegetables also require regular watering. Without regular water, vegetables will not fill out and some, like tomatoes, will crack open if suddenly plumped up with water after struggling without for a while.

**Soil:** This is essential. Vegetables need a soil rich in organic matter. Soil is important to the growth of all plants, but more so with vegetables, because even taste is affected by the quality of the soil. That is why some areas grow hotter peppers than others.

### **Small Space Growing Tips**

**Compact Varieties:** Choose varieties that are bred to grow in small spaces. Anything with the words patio, pixie, tiny, baby or dwarf in their name is what you want to look for. Just because a plant is bred to be small doesn't mean the fruits will be small or the yield will be less.

Most seeds and seedlings will tell you the mature size of the plants you are selecting. Knowing that, you can space things out and see how much you can fit into your space. If you are truly short of space, interplant your vegetables with your flowers. There is no rule that says you can't mix the two. It can be a bit harder to harvest, but many vegetables are ornamental too.

**Growing Up:** If you do want a variety of vegetables in your garden, use compact varieties and vining crops that can be trained up on supports. Pole beans take up less space than bush beans. Vining cucumbers and squash, as aggressive as they can be, actually take up less area than bush varieties.

**Companion Planting:** Companion planting is usually done to cut down on pest infestations. But, it also helps to conserve space. Shade tolerant plants benefit from being planted next to taller crops. Basil likes a break from hot sun and does well next to tomatoes. Lettuce will keep producing all summer if shaded by almost any taller plant. Early harvested crops, like spinach, radishes and peas, can be planted with slower growing crops like broccoli or peppers, which will take over once the spring crops are gone.

**Succession Planting:** Succession planting is a great technique for any vegetable garden large or small. But it is even more valuable when space is limited. Succession planting means reseeding quick growing crops every 2-3 weeks during the growing season. It is especially popular with crops like beans, zucchini and lettuce, that tend to exhaust themselves producing. By successively planting, you will have just enough produce for your family's needs, but you will have it all summer.

**Container Planting:**

Almost any fruit, vegetable or herb can be grown in a container if the container is large enough. As with ornamental container gardening, this is a great way to control the soil, sun and growing conditions of your edible plants. It is also a great way to squeeze edible gardening into the smallest plots, even the patio garden.

# Torrance Memorial Learning Garden

## Overview of Spring Planting: What To Plant Now

### Timing and Maturation

It is important to properly read the seed packet. Note: the date of the seeds, because you do not want to plant old seeds; disease resistance; germination and days to maturity; mature size of plant, for spacing; and cultural needs such as sun and water needs and time to plant. Take advantage of maturation time and use succession planting, so that all of one crop is not ready to harvest at once. Plant every 3 weeks.

### Placement and Rotation

Be sure to meet the sun requirements of the plant. There is less sun in the winter and early spring. You can take advantage of the sun reflection off a wall for added warmth.

Watch weather changes such as temperature, rain and wind, which will affect your winter and early spring plant care.

Rotate families of crops to avoid disease. Some major crop families are: nightshade family (tomatoes, peppers, eggplants), mustard family (radishes, turnips, cabbage, broccoli and other cole crops), legume family (beans and peas), gourd family (squash), goosefoot family (purslane and Swiss chard), and parsley family (cilantro, fennel, anise, parsnip, dill).

## MARCH

### Sow or transplant outside in

#### March

beets  
carrots  
celery  
chard  
herbs  
kale  
kohlrabi  
leeks  
lettuces (except iceberg)  
green onions  
bulb onion seed & sets  
parsley  
peas  
peanuts  
potatoes  
radishes  
shallots  
spinach  
strawberries

**Transplant in March** artichokes

asparagus  
broccoli  
Brussels sprouts  
cabbage  
cauliflower  
kale  
kohlrabi  
rhubarb

### Herbs to start from seed in

#### March

anise  
basil  
chervil  
chives  
cilantro (coriander)  
dill  
fennel  
lavender  
marjoram  
oregano

parsley

### Herbs to transplant in March

mint  
rosemary  
sage  
tarragon  
thyme

### Sow indoors in March for transplanting in late April or early May

eggplant  
peppers  
tomatoes

### Start indoors in March with special handling of roots

cucumbers  
eggplants  
melons  
squash

## APRIL

### **Sow or transplant in April**

asparagus  
beets  
carrots  
celery  
chard  
herbs  
kale  
kohlrabi  
leeks  
lettuces  
summer-maturing onions  
parsley  
peanuts  
the last peas (heat-tolerant such as Wando)  
white potatoes  
radishes  
rhubarb  
spinach

### **Transplant early-maturing varieties in April**

beans  
cucumbers

eggplants  
melons  
peppers  
squash  
tomatoes

### **Herbs to sow or transplant include:**

anise  
basil  
borage  
burnet  
catnip  
chervil  
chives  
cilantro (coriander)  
comfrey  
dill  
fennel  
lavender  
marjoram  
mint  
oregano  
rosemary  
sage  
savory  
tarragon

thyme

### **Sow or transplant at end of April**

beans  
corn  
cucumbers  
eggplants  
melons  
peppers  
pumpkins  
squash

### **Plant tender trees in April through June**

avocados  
citrus  
cherimoya  
guava  
kiwis  
kumquats  
mango  
passion fruit  
pomegranates

## MAY

### **Sow seeds in May**

lima and snap beans  
beets  
carrots  
celery  
chard  
chicory  
chives  
corn  
cucumbers  
leeks  
warm-season lettuces  
melons  
okras

green onions  
peanuts  
peppers  
pumpkins  
soybeans  
warm-season spinach  
squash  
sweet potatoes  
tomatoes

### **Plant in May**

citrus trees  
other tender trees

# Favorite Garden Sites

- **University of California Cooperative Extension Los Angeles County,**  
[http://celosangeles.ucanr.edu/UC\\_Master\\_Gardener\\_Program/](http://celosangeles.ucanr.edu/UC_Master_Gardener_Program/)
- **Renees's Garden Seeds,** [www.reneesgarden.com](http://www.reneesgarden.com)
- **Cornucopia Seeds,** [www.cornucopiaseeds.com](http://www.cornucopiaseeds.com)
- **Botanical Interests Seeds,**  
<https://www.botanicalinterests.com/>
- **LA County Smart Gardening Program, Upcoming Webinars**  
<http://pw.lacounty.gov/epd/sg/webinars.cfm>
- **Armstrong Nursery,** <https://www.armstronggarden.com>
- **My Frugal Home, Gardening Printables,**  
[https://www.myfrugalhome.com/category/gardening/?fwp\\_planning\\_tools=gardening-printables](https://www.myfrugalhome.com/category/gardening/?fwp_planning_tools=gardening-printables)