

The Complete Guide to Growing Food in Buckets

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 COLLAPSE SURVIVAL SITE

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO GROWING FOOD IN BUCKETS



At a time when food is over-priced, scarce, or simply not available, it's critical to maximize the yield from every square inch of garden space. Even then, some people have small yards or no yard at all. People living in townhouses and apartments often have only a small patio and some space by some windows to consider any kind of garden.

Then again, even people with fairly large yards find that planting enough food to feed their family when it's the only source isn't enough. That's just a few of the many reasons you should consider [growing food in buckets](#).

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Garden Bucket Benefits

One overlooked benefit of growing vegetables in buckets is the portability of the bucket. Early or late in the season you can easily move buckets into a shed or garage to avoid the damages of an unexpected frost or an overnight freeze.

Portability also gives you the opportunity to simply relocate a bucket when a particular plant becomes overgrown or seems to be not getting enough sunlight. Buckets also allow you to sustain perennial vegetables over the course of the year by simply moving them indoors as winter approaches.

Even self-seeders like chives, onions, and herbs like cilantro and chamomile can keep growing and growing when you can move them in or out depending on the season.

Maybe the biggest benefit of bucket gardening is the ability to grow a wide range and variety of vegetables that might otherwise be missed. One great example is the way that [mushrooms thrive in a bucket garden](#). The [buckets are also reusable](#) season to season so you can always keep your bucket gardens going.

Bucket Gardening 101

A standard [5-gallon plastic bucket](#) is the easiest and most inexpensive option for bucket gardening. If you don't like the color of the bucket you can always paint it but the size of the bucket is more than enough to contain soil and compost to keep a vegetable plant growing and strong. You'll also want to make sure it's a food-grade plastic.

One thing you'll have to consider is whether or not to punch holes towards the bottom of your bucket. Most flowerpots have a hole or a series of slits in the bottom to allow excess water to drain. This isn't a problem for a bucket outdoors but any container or bucket indoors will need a small tray or catch pot to collect any excess water.

Another option indoors or outdoors is to keep the bucket intact without any drainage holes. If you choose to go this route you'll have to be a bit judicious about watering and you'll want to be sure to incorporate some [Perlite beads](#) into the soil to help absorb excess water.

One of the benefits of punching holes in the bottom of the bucket outdoors is that the roots of some plants will travel down through the soil in the bucket, and actually emerge from the bottom holes to penetrate any soil underneath. That affords a plant the benefits of any nutrients in the soil beneath the bucket and available groundwater.

And it Doesn't Have to Be a 5-Gallon Bucket

Any container will work whether it's an old half barrel, large flower pot, pots from hanging baskets, paint buckets, or leftover tub-pots from small trees and saplings. What's important is that you have a good mix of topsoil and compost in the container. Here are a couple of good recipes for a soil

mix for bucket gardening:

SOIL MIX 1:

- 1-part topsoil
- 1 part [peat moss](#)
- 1-part coarse builders sand (don't use beach sand or play sand)

Blend the 3 ingredients together in a large tub until you're ready to fill your bucket(s).

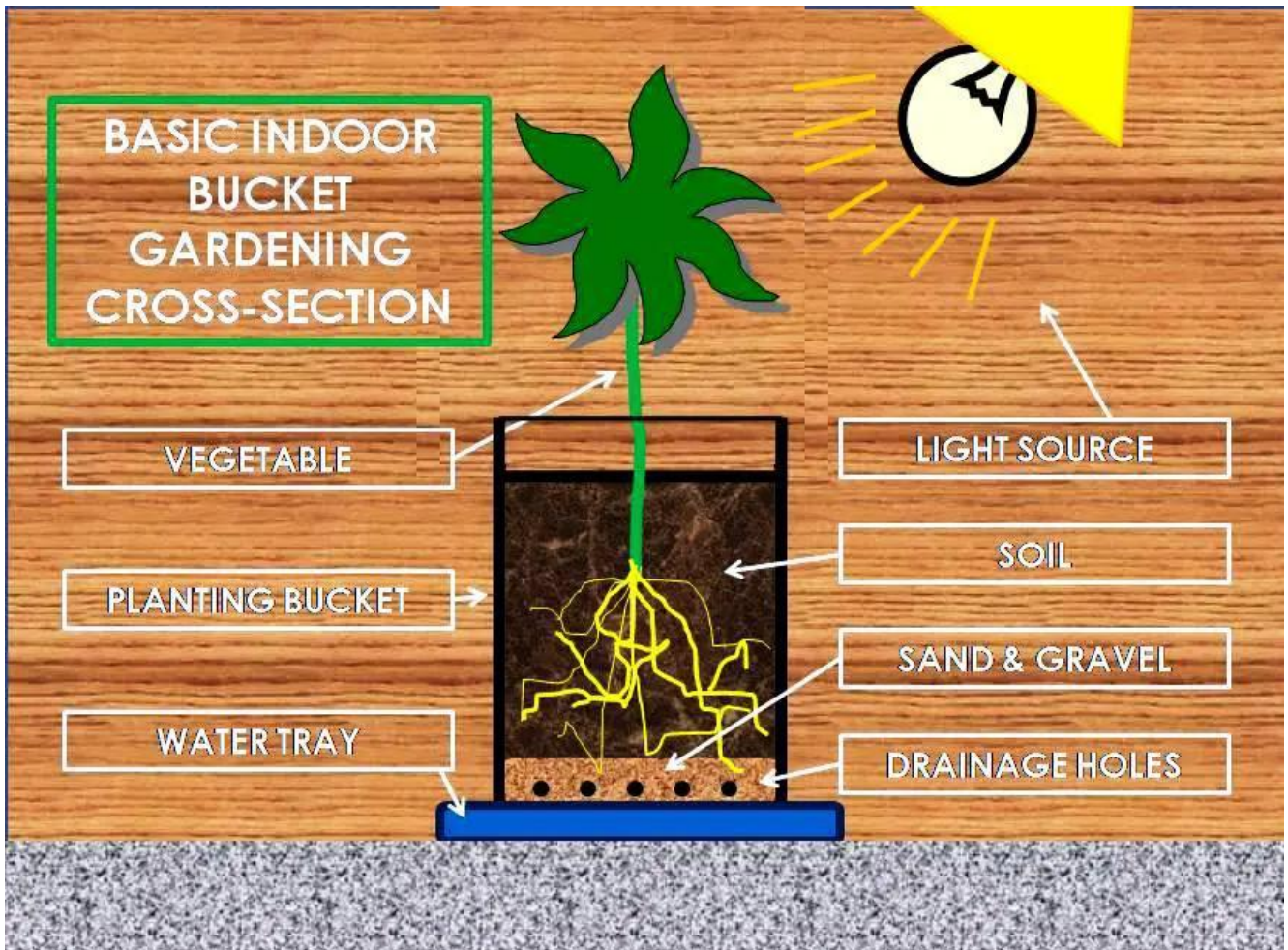
SOIL MIX 2:

- 5 gallons of compost
- 1 gallon of sand,
- 1 gallon of Perlite,
- 1 cup of granular all-purpose fertilizer.

Blend together

The first mix is totally organic while the second mix has the addition of some synthetic ingredients like Perlite and chemical fertilizer. They both work and the choice is up to you.

A Basic Bucket Setup



The above setup is a cross section of an indoor bucket garden with a water tray underneath. The bottom 2-inches of the bucket has a fill of sand and gravel with the soil/peat moss/Perlite mix filling the rest of the bucket up to about 3-inches below the rim of the bucket. If a nearby window isn't available a grow light can be used with an average "on" time of 12 to 16 hours.

Outdoors you can skip the water tray if the bucket is on the ground or in a plant stand.

Basic Equipment for Bucket Gardening

It starts with the buckets and most bucket gardeners go with a 5-gallon garden setup. Here's the basic list of supplies you'll need:

- [5-gallon](#) or other size buckets or containers
- A good garden mix of soil, peat moss, Perlite and sand or a pre-mixed soil blend specifically for container gardening
- Additional sand and gravel for the bottom of the bucket to promote drainage
- Plant food like [Miracle-Gro](#) or your own compost to feed your bucket garden
- A [watering can](#) or hose to keep your buckets watered
- [A small shovel](#)
- A weeding fork
- [Pest control spray](#) or a [natural mix to repel insects](#)
- [Fungicide control spray](#) or a natural mix to [prevent fungus](#)

Plants that Grow Best in Buckets

You may be surprised to find that most vegetables will grow quite well in a bucket. You may need to insert large stakes into the buckets if you are growing vining vegetables like cucumbers or pole beans but with proper watering and feeding you should do fine.

The obvious vegetables that don't grow well in a bucket include plants like watermelon, zucchini and other large squashes. But don't be shy about planting Beefsteak tomatoes and other large fruiting vegetables. You can always stake them to keep them growing vertically and simply tie them up as you go. Another consideration is dwarf varieties of vegetables that typically require less water and nutrients as they grow.

Here's a chart of various vegetables that can be grown in buckets and their minimum soils needs along with other tips for amount of sunlight/indoor light, water and feeding. One thing to consider is using a smaller bucket if the soil depth is 6-inches or less. This will save on your total soil usage.

Bucket Garden Plants

PLANT TYPE	VARIETIES	SOIL DEPTH	AMOUNT OF LIGHT	TIME TO HARVEST	NOTES
FRUITING VEGETABLES					
Bush Beans	Green and yellow wax beans	Minimum of 8-inches	At least 12 hours of light	10 to 14 weeks and also continue to produce	Rich soil and plenty of water
Cucumbers	Pickling varieties grown vertically	12+ inches	12 hours of direct light	10 to 14 weeks	Prefer lots of water, light and cooler temps
Peppers	Bell peppers, jalapeno, Poblano, Serrano, Habenero	Depth of 4 to 8 inches Varying based on size of the pepper plant	12 to 16 hours of direct and indirect light	8 to 14 weeks depending on variety and maturity	Prefer a rich soil mix of peat moss, sand and vermiculite
Pole Beans	All green pole bean varieties grown vertically	Up to 12-inches of soil is best	At least 12 hours of light	10 to 14 weeks but they continue to produce	Prefer a rich soil mix and plenty of water
Tomatoes	Cherry, Toy Boy, Tiny Tim, Florida Petite, Red Robin	6-inches at a minimum	12 to 16 hours of direct and indirect light	8 to 12 weeks	Sufficient light important and heavy feeders
LEAFY VEGETABLES					
Kale	All varieties	4 to 6 inches	8 to 12 hours of direct or indirect light	6 to 24 weeks from sprouts to maturity	Prefer rich soil and lots of water. Shade and cold temp tolerant

PLANT TYPE	VARIETIES	SOIL DEPTH	AMOUNT OF LIGHT	TIME TO HARVEST	NOTES
Lettuce	Green leaf, buttercup, and other compact varieties	4-inches	12 hours light	4 to 12 weeks. Harvest regularly	Does not tolerate temp fluctuations well
Spinach	All varieties	6-inches	8 to 12 hours. Can grow in indirect light	4 to 16 weeks from sprouts to full maturity	Prefer regular watering. Shade and cold temp tolerant
Swiss Chard	Golden chard, magenta sunset, Ruby rose	6-inches	12 hours of light	6 to 10 weeks. Harvest regularly	Shade and cold temp tolerant
ROOT VEGETABLES					
Beets	All varieties	8-inches	12 hours of light	60 days	Need regular water
Carrots	All varieties	8-inches	12 hours of light	80 days	Need regular water
Garlic	All varieties	4-inches	6 to 8 hours	45 days	Shade tolerant
Green onions	All varieties	4-inches	6 to 8 hours	45 days	Shade tolerant
Parsnips	All varieties	8-inches	12 hours of light	60 days	Need regular water
Potatoes	Red and gold potatoes	12+ inches	12 hours of light	90 days	Need regular water
Radishes	All varieties	6-inches	12 hours of light	30 days	Need regular water
Red onions	All varieties	4-inches	6 to 8 hours	60 days	Shade tolerant
Turnips	All varieties	8-inches	12 hours of light	45 days	Need regular water

PLANT TYPE	VARIETIES	SOIL DEPTH	AMOUNT OF LIGHT	TIME TO HARVEST	NOTES
FRUITS					
Blueberries	Top Hat, Northsky, Sunshine Blue	15 gallon bucket or half barrel	12 hours	1-year	Perennial
Mandarin Oranges	Dwarf varieties	18 to 24 inches	12 to 14 hours	4 to 6 months	Needs rich soil
Strawberries	Wild and domestic varieties	12-inches	12 hours	4 to 6 weeks from blossoms	Hardy and perennial
FUNGI					
Mushrooms	Cremini, enoki, maitake, Portobello, oyster, shiitake, and white button	At least 6-inches	None	6 to 12 months but varies by variety	Prefer darkness and regular moisture
HERBS					
Basil	All varieties	At least 6-inches	12 hours	4 weeks and ongoing	Avoid temp extremes
Chives	All varieties	At least 4-inches	8 hours	8 to 10 weeks. Frequent harvests	Harvest regularly before going to seed
Cilantro	All varieties	At least 6-inches	12 hours	4 to 6 weeks. Frequent harvests	Produces coriander seeds when mature
Dill	All varieties	At least 6-inches	12 hours	6 to 8 weeks	Harvest regularly before going to seed
Parsley	All varieties	At least 6-inches	12 hours	2 to 3 months and ongoing	Hardy

PLANT TYPE	VARIETIES	SOIL DEPTH	AMOUNT OF LIGHT	TIME TO HARVEST	NOTES
Rosemary	All varieties	At least 8-inches	12 hours	4 to 6 months and ongoing	Perennial
Sage	All varieties	At least 6-inches	12 hours	6 to 8 weeks	Hardy
Thyme	All varieties	At least 4-inches	12 hours	70 days and ongoing	Perennial

A good rule of thumb is per bucket; plant 1 tomato, 2 peppers, 3 bush or pole beans, 6 onions or lettuce, 8 beets, carrots, or radishes. You can also grow herbs easily in buckets, with the added benefit of being able to move them indoors to a sunny window during the winter.

If you intend to grow mint, it is strongly recommended that you grow it in a bucket to avoid unwanted spread. Mint will spread readily and without much warning, taking over valuable garden space.

Consolidate Your Buckets

Our tendency might be to spread our buckets around the yard as a landscaping feature. That might look nice but it's impractical. It's far easier to water, feed, harvest and manage pests if your buckets are consolidated in an area or areas. There are [DIY instructions for how to build a bucket garden stand](#) that keeps them together so maintenance is easy.

You'll also find another side benefit of bucket gardening as a built in barrier to rabbits, mice and other rodents that often nibble on the base and leaves of plants. A tall plastic bucket makes for a very effective barrier.

Bucket Garden Fails

Like any other garden a bucket garden can present some problems. Here are the most common fails with bucket gardening:

- **Improper moisture management.** Bucket gardens need to be frequently watered but there is such a thing as too much water. This is a particular problem if you have decided to forgo drainage holes for an indoor bucket garden. A good way to effectively manage watering is with the [use of a hydrometer](#) inserted into the soil. It will tell you exactly when to water and when to leave it alone.
- **Buckets that are a dark color** can absorb heat especially outdoors. Black is the worst color for a bucket and white is the best. Dark colors will cause the bucket to overheat and rapidly lose moisture and stunt the growth or even kill the plant. Repaint your buckets a light color. White is often the best.
- **Failure to feed you buckets** is another fail point. A bucket garden is a self-contained system and it doesn't have the advantage of diverse and easily spread nutrients in the ground. Get your bucket garden on a regular feeding schedule either with a chemical fertilizer, or you can use a concentrated natural compost like worm castings added to the soil from [a vermicomposting bin](#).
- **The wrong size bucket** can impact certain plants if the amount of soil isn't large enough. A 5-gallon bucket can effectively support a range of plants but if you get ambitious and decide to plant a dwarf fruit tree, blueberry bushes or grape vines you'll need at least 15 gallons of soil. A 5-gallon bucket is not going to work but a half barrel could work fine. Buckets that are too small can also be a problem on windy days especially if the plant grows significantly and catches the wind.

- **Ignoring pest and disease control** is another fail point. Just because something is growing in a bucket it doesn't mean it's not subject to pests and disease, especially outdoors. Check your plants regularly for insect damage and either remove them by hand, use [a natural repellent](#) or spray them with a commercial bug spray. The same goes for common diseases like fungus. Apply a natural solution or spray with a fungicide if any signs of fungus appear.
- **Failure to prune and harvest.** Some plants will grow extremely well in a bucket. Maybe too well. Tame your garden to keep your plants pruned and harvest when fruits are ripe to keep your plants growing strong.
- **Indoor pollination.** Most vegetables require pollination to produce fruits. Outdoors you have the wind and pollinating insects to do the work but indoors is another story. You may need to take a Q-tip and swirl it around your blossom to pollinate your indoor plants.
- **Too many plants in a bucket** is another common fail. Look at the mature size of a plant usually indicated on seed packets, or look it up online. If you think you've overplanted, pull some of the plants. At the end of the day, less is more especially in a small, confined space like a bucket.

If you happen to have some buckets around the yard or garage or even if you need to buy a few, bucket gardening can significantly add to your overall garden bounty.

And don't forget to [succession plant](#) with early maturing vegetables like radishes and beets. That can give you multiple harvests in one season. Bucket gardening is worth trying and if things continue to get much worse, it's another small but very smart step towards self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

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