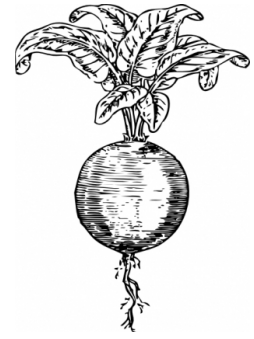


Tips for Planting a Community Garden Container

March 2013



1. Setting Up Your Container



✿ Container: Especially if your container is plastic, make sure it has adequate drainage holes. Locate the container in a place where it will get at least six hours of sunlight. Consider the front yard, where your container will generate conversation and increase awareness of the community garden project.

✿ Tools: At a minimum you'll need a trowel and a watering can or hose, and you'll probably want gardening gloves. A basic soil moisture meter, hand weeding tool and plant tags are nice extras. A soil thermometer is another extra that will help you determine when the soil is ready for various types of seeds.

✿ Soil: *The most important thing in your container is the soil!* If you start with healthy, nutrient-rich soil that has plenty of organic matter, everything else will practically grow itself. In a pinch, you could use plain soil from your property, but you will get far better results if you use a combination of soil & compost (homemade or store bought) or if you buy a high-quality bagged planting compost.



2. Deciding What to Plant



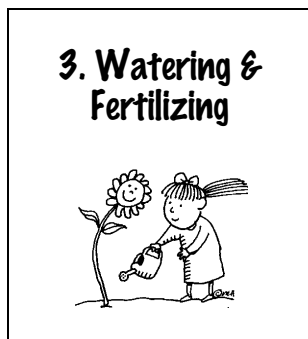
✿ What is the need? Because you plan to donate the produce you grow, I would recommend contacting the organization or agency you hope will receive your produce *before* you decide what to plant. Ask them what they most need and let their answers guide your plant selection. Consider high-value crops (organic lettuce, tomatoes), crops that will be harvested all at once, or crops you can turn into value-added products such as jam or pesto.

✿ When to plant various veggies: Refer to the vegetable planting guides on the OSU Extension Office, Portland Nursery, and Northwest Edible Life websites (URLs below) for detailed information about maritime northwest planting timelines.

✿ Seeds or starts? You will be able to grow more for less money if you start seeds and have transplants ready to go into the container each time you harvest and more space becomes available. Seeds also give you better choice of plant varieties.

✿ Container-specific plants: Many plants have been bred specifically to grow in containers, such as the "Patio Star" zucchini sold by Territorial Seed. For tomatoes, look for determinate varieties, which will be compact and produce all of their fruit over a short time period.

✿ Don't forget the flowers! Consider adding flowers to your container to attract pollinators. Low growers or flowers like nasturtium that will flow over the container edges are good choices. Territorial Seed sells a dwarf marigold called "Red Gem" that would work well. Check Portland Nursery's companion planting chart for good matches between flowers and veggies.



✿ Watering: It's true that most container crops will need more frequent watering than crops that are planted directly in the ground. However, if you're using a plastic container you'll need to be careful not to overwater. Plastic containers will retain much more moisture than wood or clay containers. The location of the container (full sun or part shade) also makes a difference. The best way to determine watering needs is to check the soil with a moisture meter or your hands, and to watch the plants.

✿ Fertilizing: That all-important soil in your container will need to be replenished with nutrients as your plants grow and draw resources from the soil, and as nutrients leach out with watering. For routine fertilizing (once or twice monthly with established crops), powdered organic mixtures similar to EB Stone's Tomato and Vegetable Food are good bets, as are liquid organic fertilizers like fish emulsion or kelp extract. Try different things and see what works best for your situation.

You'll also want to add plenty of organic matter (compost, worm castings, aged manure, etc.) to your soil between plantings. You can also fertilize with "green manure"--cover crops like clover that are grown and then turned into the soil specifically to enrich it with nutrients and organic matter. Experiment with growing a quick cover crop once in a while.

4. Pest Control & Other Care



✿ Pests: There will be pests! The question is what to do about them. In a small container garden, pests can often be kept under control with daily hand-picking or spraying with water. Check ahead of time with the agency or organization that will receive your produce. It may have restrictions on the kinds of organic or conventional pesticides that can be applied to donated produce before it's harvested. Depending on the crop, you can also take preventive measures (i.e. bird netting, companion planting.)

✿ Tomatoes: Many gardeners prune side shoots from indeterminate tomato plants to increase fruit production and get a bigger harvest. If you are growing a determinate tomato plant in your container, do not pinch off the suckers, as that will reduce yield in this type of tomato.



5. Garden Recordkeeping



✿ Garden notes: If you plan to continue your community container garden for more than just one season or year, you'll want to keep a record of your practices, successes and failures and other garden observations. Keeping track of what you've learned in an organized way helps you become a more efficient gardener and helps you grow more produce each year.

✿ What to use: A cheap wire bound notebook works well and has plenty of space. A bound, unlined journal is nice if you like to include sketches and pictures. Consider the garden planner available on the Northwest Edible Life website (URL below) if you are adding the community container to an existing, large garden and have lots of stuff to keep track of.



6. Composting



✿ Compost: Homemade compost is the best and cheapest way to improve and maintain your soil, and it reduces landfill waste. There are many ways to compost! *The Complete Compost Gardening Guide* is a great resource for beginning and experienced composters. See if your local library has it.

✿ Vermicomposting: A worm bin is a nice composting alternative if you don't have a ton of space (or grass/leaves to deal with), but still want to compost kitchen scraps. Worm "castings" (poop) are an excellent fertilizer.

7. Books, Internet & Other Resources



✿ Veggie gardening reference books

- *Food Grown Right, in Your Backyard: A Beginner's Guide to Growing Crops at Home*, by Colin Mccrate and Brad Halm
- *Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades*, by Steve Solomon
- *How to Grow More Vegetables*, by John Jeavons
- *Teaming with Microbes: The Organic Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web*, by Jeff Lowenfels and Wayne Lewis
- *The Complete Compost Gardening Guide*, by Barbara Pleasant and Deborah L. Martin
- *The Gardener's Guide to Better Soil*, by Gene Logsdon
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✿ Northwest Edible Life

www.nwedible.com

Vegetable gardening information and advice (and a lot more!) for maritime northwest gardeners. Look for the monthly "To Do" posts. If you like to keep detailed notes and have a larger garden, Erica offers a comprehensive garden planner/journal.

✿ OSU Extension

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/>

Lots of useful and up-to-date information here. Look in particular for the "grow your own vegetables" link, which will take you to a planting calendar and other resources.

✿ Portland Nursery

www.portlandnursery.com/plants/vegetables-herbs/

Great companion planting chart and vegetable planting calendar, along with many other Oregon-specific resources.

✿ Territorial Seed Company

www.territorialseed.com

Seed company out of Cottage Grove, OR. This is a great resource for buying seed that will thrive in all areas of Oregon. Website has a video series with planting and harvesting advice.