

Container Gardening for Kids

Overview: A container garden makes a great first garden project. All you need is something that can hold soil with small holes in the bottom for excess water to drain.

Materials:

- Container (a 3- or 5-gallon bucket works great)
- Potting Soil
- Seeds or young plants

Approximate Time to Complete: 30 minutes

Location: Indoor or Outdoor

Ages: All Ages

Season: Spring through Fall

Instructions:

1. Container gardens are a great first garden project for gardeners of all ages. The following instructions are for planting a container garden in a bucket, but you can make a container garden from any object that holds soil that you can drill drainage holes in – even an old shoe or boot.
2. Start by deciding if you want to plant edible crops or if you want to stick to ornamental plants. The reason to determine this ahead of time is that if you want plant edibles, you need to be extra careful to choose buckets that are food grade safe.
3. Next collect your buckets. If you have chosen to make an edible garden, look for buckets that are labeled “Food Grade Container” at the hardware store, or you may also want to check with local restaurants or grocery stores to see if they might have buckets they can donate to you. Many bulk food items are delivered in buckets and so they may have some on hand. Common sizes for buckets are 3 gallons and 5 gallons.
4. Pick out your plants. You can start your garden by planting seeds or by selecting young seedlings. If you have a 3-gallon bucket, look for smaller plants that stay compact such as herbs, lettuce or seasonal annuals. If you have a 5-gallon container, you can grow just about any type of annual vegetable or landscape plant because you have more room for roots; however, the ultimate size of your plant will determine how many will fit in each bucket. For example, you would only want one cherry tomato or one cucumber plant per 5-gallon bucket.

If you are planting several different types of plants in one container, make sure they have the same



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sunlight and water requirements. For example, thyme, rosemary and sage like full sun and very well-drained soil. Basil and dill like full sun, too, but need consistently moist soil.

5. Pick out your potting soil. You will want to use a well-draining potting mix that absorbs water but also drains well. Don't use soil from the yard or garden, because it likely drains poorly and may contain plant disease organisms.

6. Drill 5 to 7 holes in the bottom of your bucket. The holes should be about ¼ to ½” in diameter. If you want, you can also decorate the outside of your container with paint, waterproof markers or by adding other decorations. It is usually easier to decorate before you add soil.

7. Moisten your soil before placing it in your bucket. To make sure your soil mix is evenly moist, it is best to slowly add water and mix it thoroughly before placing it in the bucket. If you do not do this ahead of time, you may end up with pockets of soil that stay dry and will have more settling of the soil over time.

8. Place your soil in your bucket and plant. If you are planning on planting seeds, add soil to about 1 inch below the rim then follow the directions listed on the seed packet. If you are planting seedlings, add soil until reaching the size of the seedling pot plus about 1 inch. For example if you are planting seedlings currently in a 4-inch-tall pot, add soil until you have about 5 inches left. Then take the seedlings out of the pot, place them in the container and carefully add soil around the roots. You want to end up with the soil about an inch or so below the rim. If your soil is too high, it will be difficult to water your containers. However, also avoid having your soil too low, because then you will not have good air movement around your stems and you may end up having problems with disease.

9. Gently water your new garden until water begins to drain from the bottom. Place your containers in a spot to match your plants' sunlight needs.

10. Enjoy! Check on your container garden daily and look for changes and growth. Monitor to determine watering needs. The best way to determine when your new container garden needs water is to put your finger in the soil and check to see if it is dry. Also keep an eye out for pest problems and nip them in the bud early.

Check out [Consider Container Gardening](#) for additional background information.

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