



TINY SPACES, TASTY HARVESTS

*A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
GROWING FOOD IN CONTAINERS*



SNOHOMISH CONSERVATION DISTRICT



ABOUT SNOHOMISH CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Our mission is to engage people with voluntary actions that keep our air, water, soil, habitats, and farmland healthy for all.

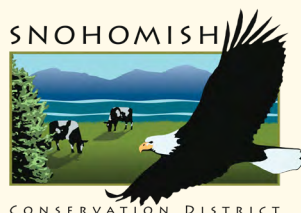
We are a non-regulatory government agency that provides free technical assistance to landowners and residents in Snohomish County and Camano Island. Our goal is to provide local solutions to local problems to protect our natural resources.

IN THIS GUIDE

- Getting Started
- Location, Containers, Plants, & Soil
- Planting & Maintaining Your Garden
- Troubleshooting & Additional Resources
- Garden Calendar for the PNW



National Association of
Conservation Districts



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CONTAINER GARDENING is a great option if you don't have access to outdoor space to plant a garden, or if you want to utilize space on a balcony, patio, or windowsill to grow plants!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED ALONG THE WAY: containers, soil, and seeds or plant starts (young plants from a nursery or store).

First time container gardener? Start small! Plant a few beginner-friendly species first, then add another species or two each year as you learn and become more confident. Choose plants you will enjoy eating. Don't be disappointed if not everything goes well the first year. Practice makes progress. You can do it!



1) LOCATION

Look for spots where your plants will get plenty of sunlight and where you will be able to keep an eye on them. Many plants can thrive in small containers kept indoors, such as herbs on your windowsill year-round. Others can be grown on balconies, patios, front stoops, and other sunny spots.

SUNSHINE!

All plants need light to grow. Some need more than others. Check how much sunlight your location gets and read the information on your seed packets or the internet for each plant's sun requirements.



2-4 HOURS OF SUNLIGHT

Chard, lettuce, endive, arugula, mustard greens, parsley.



4-6 HOURS OF SUNLIGHT

Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, brussel sprouts.



6+ HOURS OF SUNLIGHT

Corn, tomatoes, peppers, beans, melons, squash, cucumbers, most herbs.

2) CONTAINERS & PLANTS

Right plant, right pot. Your plants and containers should be a good match for each other. If you want to grow specific plants, pick the right containers for them. If you already have containers, choose plants that will thrive in what you have.



SHALLOW ROOTS 6" TO 9"

chives, lettuces, green onions, radishes, spinach



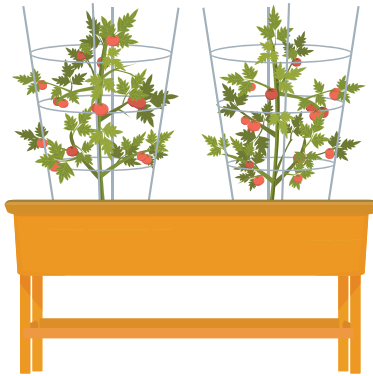
MODERATE ROOTS 10" TO 18"

eggplant, peppers, beets, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, chard, kale, peas



DEEP ROOTS 18" TO 24"

tomatoes, potatoes, zucchini, squash, beans, corn, cucumbers



CONTAINERS

Almost anything that holds soil can be used! Even empty milk jugs and 2-liter soda bottles can be made into planting pots by cutting off the tops and poking small holes in the bottom.

YOUR CONTAINER NEEDS:

SPACE

Plants need space for their roots. In general, smaller plants' containers can be shallower, and larger plants' containers must be deeper.

DRAINAGE

Small holes (a quarter inch or less in diameter) in the bottom allow extra water to drain out and prevent roots from rotting. Poke or cut holes (carefully!) into the bottom of your container if needed. Place the container on small blocks, pot feet, or pebbles so there is room for water to drain out of the holes. Placing a saucer underneath to catch water that drains out prevents messes.

PLANTS

Some plants are easier to grow in containers than others. If you're new to gardening, start with a few beginner-friendly varieties.

HERBS

Many herbs such as oregano, thyme, cilantro, mint, and lavender do well in containers and add fresh flavor to many types of recipes!

LEAFY GREENS

Lettuce and kale are great choices. Cut-and-come-again lettuces let you harvest outer leaves as they grow, providing a steady supply of fresh food.

FRUITS & VEGGIES

Small cucumbers are great climbers with even greater yields! Strawberries offer a sweet perennial treat, meaning they return for several years on their own.

HOW TO GO VERTICAL

If your garden area has a lot of height, choose plants or a set-up that takes advantage of vertical space. You can get creative with stacking and hanging pots, or purchase a vertical garden plant stand. You can also choose vining and climbing plants like peas, beans, and cucumbers that will climb up trellises.



3) CHOOSE HEALTHY SOIL!

Potting soil from the store is best for containers because it provides nutrients, excellent drainage, and air space. Potting soil often comes with fertilizer or compost already in it (look for statements on the bag like "contains organic nutrients," or "contains fertilizer"). If it doesn't contain added nutrients, ask your garden center or nursery staff for recommendations for your choice of plants.

4) START PLANTING

Moisten (but don't drench) the soil before you start planting.

SEEDS: Check your seed packet for how deep to plant. Use your finger or a pencil to make a hole, and cover the seed with soil. If planting inside, keep your container in a warm, sunny place while the seed grows.

PLANT STARTS (young plants in small containers): Gently push from the bottom of the container to ease the plant from its pot, and dig a hole in the new container that is the same size as the plant's roots. While replanting, be sure to **match the soil level** so that stems and leaves are not covered!



FAQ / CHALLENGES

WHAT IS BOLTING?

Bolting is when some plants shift their energy to producing flowers and seeds. This happens mostly with cool-season plants due to heat or stress, and makes the edible parts of the plant bitter, ending the harvest. Lettuce, spinach, onions, and cilantro are common culprits. If your plant bolts, collect seeds for next year, and enjoy the pollinators visiting the flowers!

SIGNS OF TROUBLE:

YELLOWING LEAVES AROUND THE EDGES

Lack of sunlight or nutrients: move to a sunnier location or mix additional compost or fertilizer into the soil. Be careful not to damage fragile plant roots!



DROOPY OR CRUNCHY LEAVES

Lack of water: water more frequently and be sure you see water draining from the container when you water.



MILDEW OR MOLD ON SOIL OR PLANTS

Excess of water or lack of air flow: let the top inch of soil get dry before you water. Be sure the plant isn't crowded and is in a location where air moves through the plant.



5) MAINTAIN YOUR GARDEN

WATER

- All plants need water to grow. Containers dry out faster and need more frequent watering, especially if they're outside!
- Always check your soil's moisture before watering: when the top inch of soil feels dry, add water until it drains from the bottom of the container.

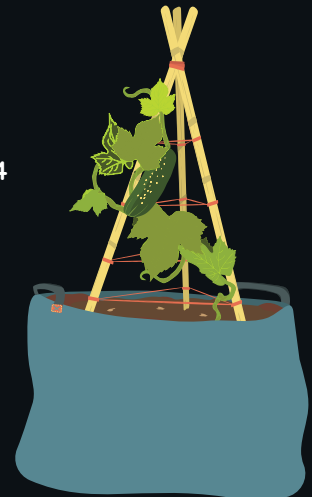
HARVESTING/REPLANTING

- How often you can harvest varies by plant. Some plants, especially herbs, can be harvested in small amounts and will continue to produce more. Harvest leafy greens starting with the outer leaves.
- Remove damaged, diseased, or pest-infested leaves and vegetables.
- Each year, remove about half of the old soil and add new soil with compost or fertilizer to your containers to replenish nutrients.

GENERAL GUIDANCE

Ready to dig deeper? Explore these resources.

- SCD's Lawns to Lettuce program: snohomishcd.org/lawns-to-lettuce
- Tilth Alliance Garden Hotline: Call 206-633-0224 for free help with your questions
- Tilth Alliance Maritime Gardening Guide
- WSU's publication "Home Vegetable Gardening in Washington"
- The Old Farmer's Almanac at almanac.com
- WSU's Master Gardener program and publications
- Down to Earth Community Gardens, a Lake Stevens-based non-profit supporting growing healthy food



GARDEN CALENDAR

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
					BEANS*						
					BEETS						
					BROCCOLI						
					CABBAGE, SUMMER						
					CABBAGE, WINTER						
					CARROTS						
					CHIVES						
					CILANTRO						
					CUCUMBER						
					KALE						
					LAVENDER						
					LETTUCE						
					ONIONS						
					OREGANO						
					PEAS						
					PEPPERS						
					SPINACH						
					SQUASH*						
					STRAWBERRY*						
					THYME						
					TOMATO						