



Your Full Service Nursery & Landscape Center
Since 1987
3166 Willow Creek Road, Prescott
www.mortimer-nursery.com
776-8000 / info@mortimer-nursery.com

Edible Gardening in Containers

When picturing a vegetable garden many of us envision strict rows of plants in raised beds. But if you don't have the room for raised beds or just want your vegetables and herbs closer to your backdoor and easier harvest then consider growing them in containers.

When deciding what edibles to plant be realistic about what you like to eat and what you don't. You don't have to grow radishes if you don't like them! Also consider how much you and your family can reasonably consume, especially if you don't plan on canning or freezing.

Although there is a wide variety of edibles that can be successfully grown in a container, some take up too much space and are best left to in-ground gardens. Here are a few that are too space-hungry for containers: watermelon and most cantaloupes, pumpkins and winter squash, corn, cabbage, full-size fruit trees, and beefsteak-type tomatoes.

To make the best use of containers, try succession planting which is the practice of replacing plants past their productive peak with those that are coming into season. Here is an example of a successive planting in a container (this example is taken from "The Bountiful Container" by Rose Marie Nichols McGee and Maggie Stuckey): in spring sow seeds of cool-season vegetables and herbs such as loose-leaf lettuce, chervil and calendula. In late spring/early summer, remove lettuce and chervil and plant one hot pepper plant in the middle of the pot. Also sow cilantro seeds where the lettuce was. The calendula should last into fall. In fall, when the hot pepper, calendula and cilantro are past their peak, sow loose-leaf lettuce again along with arugula and scallions.

When selecting containers match the depth of the container to what is needed by the roots of the plants. You'll often find that less depth is needed than you might have thought. Let's look at a few commonly grown edibles and the minimum soil depth they require:

- Beets: 6"
- Carrots: 8"
- Leafy greens such as Swiss Chard and Kale: 8"
- Scallions: 6"
- Peppers: 8"
- Tomatoes: 12"
- Herbs: generally 6 – 8"

Some vegetables can be grown through the fall, such as onions, scallions, Swiss Chard and Kale. Herbs, however, should be brought indoors for the winter. Here are a few herbs that can be successfully over-wintered indoors: basil, parsley, sage, rosemary, oregano and chives.

Growing fruiting plants in containers is more of a long-term commitment than growing vegetables – larger containers made of a material such as wood, plastic or fiberglass that can last outside in winter are needed, as well as more time (1- 2 years at a minimum, excepting strawberries) for the plant to produce fruit. But it's worth it to taste your own freshly grown fruit! Fruiting bushes such as blueberries, currants, grapes, and, of course, strawberries, can all be grown successfully in the right container.

As with ornamentals, don't let a lack of in-ground garden space stop you from gardening. With just a few containers you can enjoy months of fresh vegetables, herbs and fruits!