



Gardening in Small Spaces

I. Container Gardening – What is it, and what are the pros and cons.

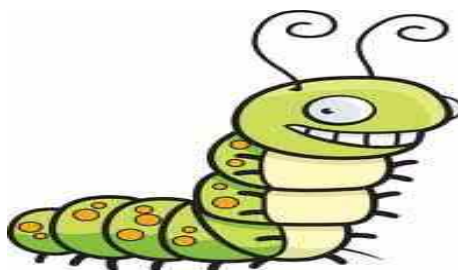
Container Gardening is the practice of growing plants exclusively in containers as opposed to the more traditional method of in-ground gardening. Containers can vary widely in material, shape, and size. Just like in-ground gardening, container gardening in our climate presents it's own unique challenges.

a. Reasons to use Containers

- i. Limited Space – Containers are perfect for small spaces like patios and balconies.
- ii. Limited access or mobility – No digging involved, containers come in all sizes.
- iii. Container gardening is easy! – No digging!, no caliche, no weeding.
- iv. Reduced Water Use – Container gardens use less water than traditional growing methods.
- v. Portability - Containers can be used to extend the growing season
- vi. Security – Containers can be easily secured from predators and insects.

b. The Downsides of Gardening with Containers

- i. Limited Space – Container growing can limit production.
- ii. Cannot grow all plants – Some plants, like corn, will not grow well in containers.
- iii. It is difficult to create a micro-climate or habitat for beneficial insects.



II. Effective Container Gardening Methods for Southern Arizona.

Container gardening in our climate presents many unique challenges. By adapting our containers and our growing environment and methods we can greatly reduce many of the common problems associated with container gardening in an arid climate.



- a. **When Selecting a Container, Bigger is Better** – 5 Gallon buckets make a great multi-purpose container. Restaurants are a good source, as is Eege’s warehouse on Ajo. Use food grade plastic only indicated by the recycling stamps 1, 2, and 5.
- b. **Use Light Colored Containers** – Food buckets are often white, but water based paints can also be used. You can also wrap your containers in burlap.
- c. **Try to Create a Microclimate** – Grouping containers together can raise humidity and slow water loss. Plant trellised and tall growing plants on the south and west sides of your garden to create shade. You can place small containers into larger ones. Be creative.
- d. **Self-Watering Containers** – Self watering containers are an excellent option for container gardening. You can purchase self-watering containers or make your own.

III. Care and Maintenance of Your Container Garden.

Container gardening presents its own unique set of challenges, however, if simple steps are taken plants grown in containers will not only grow well in our climate, they will thrive.

- a. **Not All Potting Mixes are Created Equal** – High quality potting mix is a must for growing vegetables in containers. Avoid “woody” mixes and those containing synthetic slow release fertilizers. Create your own potting mix using compost, coconut husk, and vermiculite. Perlite and sand can also be added to increase drainage. Native soil and peat moss are not recommended ingredients. Organic fertilizers such as worm castings will work wonders in containers.
- b. **Frequent Low Dose Fertilizer Applications** – Because nutrients are readily washed from potting mixes, it is very important that they be added frequently to avoid stressing your plants. Diluted solutions of liquid fertilizers such as fish oil and liquid seaweed should be added frequently to replace depleted nutrients. Applications of compost tea are also highly beneficial.
- c. **End of Season Maintenance** – At the end of the growing season, you’ll want to pull your plants and empty your containers to clear out any roots. Renew your soil with some compost and organic fertilizers. If your plants died from disease, discard your soil, clean your containers and start from scratch.