

# Tips for Starting a Home Garden

The nation has experienced a resurgence of home gardens due to the COVID-19 crisis. Home gardens provide a source of food, while providing an outlet for an outdoor activity for those staying at home and practicing social distancing. Home gardens also make a great teaching tool for students who are learning from home because the subjects of math and science can be incorporated into gardening while simultaneously demonstrating where food comes from.

## Home Gardens

Home gardens provide nourishment, bring families closer, teach valuable life skills and cause a sense of independence and confidence in the midst of uncertainty.

During these days of stress, uncertainty, and isolation, something as simple, natural, and fun as gardening can uplift spirits. As many are staying home and practicing social distancing, we have created new routines, indulged in new hobbies (and re-engaged in some old ones), explored some newly introduced interests, and discovered new entertainment sources. Since social distancing does not mean that we can't go outside, enjoy the fresh spring breeze, and start an easy-to-maintain garden, why not start now?

## Victory Gardens

During World Wars I and II, a severe food crisis emerged in Europe, leaving the burden of feeding millions of starving people to the United States. Americans were encouraged to contribute to the war effort by cultivating their own fruits and vegetables so that more food could be exported to the Allies. These home gardens would become known as 'Victory Gardens' or 'war gardens.' These gardens often consisted of tomatoes, carrots, lettuce, beets and peas and introduced us to Swiss chard and kohlrabi because they were easy to grow.

## Getting Started

Planting a garden is not difficult. The most challenging part is oftentimes trying to determine what you would like to plant.

When planning your garden consider:

- The size of the area that you will plant.
- Which fruits and vegetables are your favorites?
- Which growing zone are you located in?

- Will you start with seeds or transplants?
- Do you have access to a water source?

## Basic Tools Needed to Get Started

- Hand Pruner or Shears
- Hand Trowel
- Watering Can
- Shovel, Hoe or Spade
- Seeds or Transplants

The [Mississippi Market Bulletin](#) is a source to find seeds and other gardening essentials. [GeniuneMS.com](#) is a good source to find local nurseries for fruit and vegetable transplants, flowers and other garden essentials.

## No Yard, No Problem: Container Vegetable Gardens for the Win

No yard? Well, no problem! Container gardens can be created in even the tiniest outdoor spaces (some people even create them indoors). This garden type is great for people who may want to occasionally move plants into the house, control the soil quality, or want to grow year-round herbs and vegetables. Take advantage of your doorway, balcony, rooftop, or patio with this garden! Other than tiny space, you only need four things to get started: a container, plants, soil and water.

Some plants that flourish in container gardens include beetroots, potatoes, chard, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, summer squash and pole beans. And the best news: less weeding! Ready to get started this month with a low-maintenance garden? Well, check out these tips for building your very first container garden.

## Selecting a Container

- Select a large container, because small containers dry out more quickly. (You can even

purchase a self-watering planter to reduce watering chores and keep the soil consistently moist.) Honestly, anything that holds soil—buckets, baskets (even hanging baskets are all right), boxes, tubs and troughs—will suffice. Just be sure that whatever you decide to use has drainage holes in the bottom.

- Plastic pots retain moisture well, so aim for finding one of these. If you prefer clay pots for their appearance, place a plastic pot inside of a larger clay pot.
- Keep in mind: Black pots absorb heat when they are sitting in the sun.
- Consider the depth of the container. Plants with deep root systems will not thrive if they do not have adequate space.
- Hanging baskets make good use of extra space. These are great for herbs and cherry tomatoes.

## Selecting Location for Container

- Many vegetables require at least six hours of sunlight per day. Salad greens and herbs can usually get by with less. Tomatoes, peppers, beans and other sun-lovers will appreciate as much sun as they can get. If your available space is not sunlight-friendly, your plants can be transported on caddies to get their desired amount of sunlight as the sun angle changes.
- Choose a space protected from too much wind. Strategically arrange larger plants in front of smaller pots to shield them from the wind.

## Choosing Soil

- Rule of thumb: Add about 1 inch of coarse gravel in the bottom of containers to improve drainage.
- Do not use soil from your yard. This soil is too heavy and could bring disease and insects with it. Instead, invest in container soils (often referred to as soilless or artificial media).

## Watering and Fertilizing

- Feed container plants at least twice a month with liquid fertilizer, following the instructions on the label.

- Keep the soil moist but not soaked. Tip: Stick a finger about an inch down into the soil. If the soil feels dry, add water.
- Because potting soil dries out faster than standard garden soil, container-grown plants need more frequent watering. In fact, you may need to water these plants daily or even twice daily.

## Plant Supports

You can support your climbing vegetables with trellises, stakes, netting, twine or cages.

## Plant Combinations

- You should plant root crops, low-growers and tall climbers together in the same container to maximize space. With this combination, the climbers will travel up a trellis, while the smaller plants freely spread around their base. Brilliant, right?
- Quick-maturing plants, such as lettuce or radishes, go well with longer-growing ones, like tomatoes or broccoli.
- Put vegetable plants together based on the amount of sunlight they all require.

## Resources

Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSU-ES)  
<http://extension.msstate.edu/lawn-and-garden>

MSU-ES Garden Tabloid  
<http://extension.msstate.edu/publications/publications/garden-tabloid>

Southern Gardening  
<http://extension.msstate.edu/shows/southern-gardening>

Genuine MS (Mississippi-grown plants, gardening tools)  
<https://genuinems.com>

*Mississippi Market Bulletin* (seeds, gardening essentials)  
<http://MSMarketbulletin.org>

