

May 31, 2010

## Vegetable Gardening in Containers

For the past couple of weeks, I have been covering container gardening and the variety of gardens that can be created or enhanced by the use of containers. Food crops are the most practical kind of garden for containers, as not everyone has a large garden or 40 acres and a mule to help plow. Additionally, a window box of herbs or a tub of tomatoes is an easy project to start with children.

Again, keep light requirements in mind when you begin your garden. Any vegetable that is producing a fruit, like tomato, eggplant, or squash will need 8 hours of sunlight a day. Root crops, such as beets, carrots, and turnips, will also require 8 hours of sunlight exposure. Green leafy vegetables, such as spinach, lettuce and Swiss chard will tolerate a bit less light or partial shade. Cilantro, parsley and other herbs mostly prefer full sunlight, but they will also tolerate conditions that are sometimes shady.

Water needs to be in a convenient place. Vegetable crops in containers will require regular watering to thrive and produce your salad. Additionally, keep in mind that potting soil does not contain important nutrients needed by these fast growing crops, so you will need to provide these in the form of fertilizer. How often you fertilize depends on the crop and how small the container. If you have utilized large 25 gallon pots, filled with good potting soil, for your garden vegetables these pots may not dry out as quickly as 5 gallon containers and may require less frequent watering.

For fertilizer, if you want to use organic methods, utilize compost tea (a commercial product), sea tea or sea weed, or fish emulsion. My favorite is fish emulsion; however, all of the cats in the neighborhood may think you are leaving treats around the yard for them to find! So, use fish emulsion if there is no large waiting cat population. Several companies are making fertilizer now that is approved for organic production, so check the labels. If you are not concerned about organic production, the major commercial products for home gardeners, like Miracle Grow™, work well. No matter which product you choose, be sure to follow instructions and do not double the amount that is recommended. Provide support for vines with small trellises and keep records of what you planted, when you planted and how much was harvested. Then make notes so that, next year, you will know if a certain variety did well for you.

You can find a planting schedule for south Texas at our web site: <http://hidalgo-tx.tamu.edu>. Additionally, lots of good information is available at: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>. Join us for the last farmer's market of the season on Saturday, June 5, from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. Special guest chef is Gabriel Lara of All Affairs and Occasions. For more information, contact our office at (956) 383-1026.

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