

# History at Home: Make a Container Garden

## Purpose:

In this time of supply chain shortages due to the global pandemic, a container garden is a fun activity with a practical purpose. In a few weeks, you can have fresh fruits and vegetables in your own backyard, on a patio, or even a balcony.

## Info for Parents or Guardians:

You could share a little or a lot of the information that follows with children depending on their ages before you start the activity. This activity itself is geared towards children ages 5 and up. The history below is for ages 8 and up. If the children are younger, speak in more general terms and provide a greater amount of help with the activity. These activities are designed to utilize materials that you probably already have at home.

## Container Garden History:

Container gardens have a surprisingly long history and have been around for thousands of years. It all started when people began living in cities. The most well-known ancient container garden is probably the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the original Seven Wonders of the World. Although no one knows exactly what they looked like, this image from the 1800s depicts a fantastic version of how they might have been.

However the gardens looked, they must have been magnificent to be considered a world wonder. The gardens were described in ancient Greek writings as a series of tiered gardens containing a wide variety of trees, shrubs, and vines.



Engraving of Hanging Gardens of Babylon, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wikimedia Commons Image

Middle Ages type of container garden



The Ancient Greeks themselves made rooftop container gardens. Later, wealthy Romans had courtyards in their homes with gardens that included plants in containers. During the Middle Ages, the focus was on primarily on farming, although monks did grow herbs and flowers within their monasteries sometimes in raised bed containers like the ones in this photo.

During the Renaissance, and the Age of Exploration that followed, there was renewed interest in gardening as the middle and upper classes grew. People began to keep gardens in their homes again, and Europeans really liked tropical plants from around the world. Since these don't grow easily in a cold climate, they began creating the greenhouses in the 1600s. People even grew pineapples in containers. Container gardening has continued as a popular hobby since then. During World War II, many Americans grew gardens because there was less food and much of it had to be sent overseas to troops fighting the war.

For this activity, you are going to make your own container garden. Using a container is a little easier than gardening in the ground because it cuts down on the number of weeds and insects especially if you use a good quality potting soil to start.



# Make Your Own Container Garden

## Materials required:

- Containers like: terra cotta or ceramic pots, 5 gallon buckets, milk jugs or 2 liter bottles with tops cut off, old plastic bins, mason jars (for small plants like herbs)
- Potting soil or clean soil from your yard
- Seeds
- Small shovel or your hands to move the dirt
- Water-from a hose, or watering can,
- Gloves (if you don't want to get your hands dirty)

## Activity Directions:

1. **Find containers around your house to put dirt and plants in, the larger the better.** Some plants like tomatoes and cucumbers, benefit by having larger containers with more dirt. This will help the plants grow better and provide them with more nutrients from the dirt. Be creative. You can cut the tops off of milk jugs, or two liter bottles. Just don't use anything that held household chemicals, motor oil, or gasoline. You could even repurpose pots that currently hold flowers with permission from your parent or guardian.



2. **If you are using plastic containers like milk jugs 2 liter bottles, plastic bins or 5 gallon buckets, get an adult to poke or drill 3 or 4 pencil sized holes in the bottom of the containers.** Ceramic and terra cotta pots already have a larger drain hole. This will help the water drain out of the bottom of the container when you water the plant. It is not good for the plant to have too much water, and this can happen without drain holes in the container.



3. **Fill the containers with soil using a shovel or your hands (if getting dirt from a bag) to nearly to an inch from the top.** You can use clean dirt in your yard or use bags of topsoil or potting soil from your local store or garden center. Do not use dirt from a yard where animals are kept.



4. **Plant your seeds in the dirt according to the directions on the seed packet.**

Plan on putting seeds for bell peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, and other larger vegetables in larger containers. Put seeds for smaller vegetables in smaller containers. Check the seed packets for directions. The directions normally tell you how deep to plant the seeds, how far apart to plant them, and how much sunlight each type of plant needs.



5. **Until your seeds have sprouted, keep the dirt moist, and try not to let it dry out.** Water with a fine-spray hose nozzle or use a



watering can which will not wash away the soil. Water about once a day.

6. **Then watch and wait.** Some seeds sprout after almost a week and a half to two weeks, but others can take longer. It all depends on the seeds you've chosen. (If you want to plant seeds that will grow quickly, try bean seeds, pumpkin seeds or tomato seeds.) It is very exciting to see your seedlings popping up out of the ground!

7. **If you have planted a lot of seeds close together, you may have to remove or move extra seedlings after they have about 4 leaves on them to make sure that each plant has enough room to grow.** As you can see in the photo, I planted some too close together and will have to move the seedlings around when they are larger.

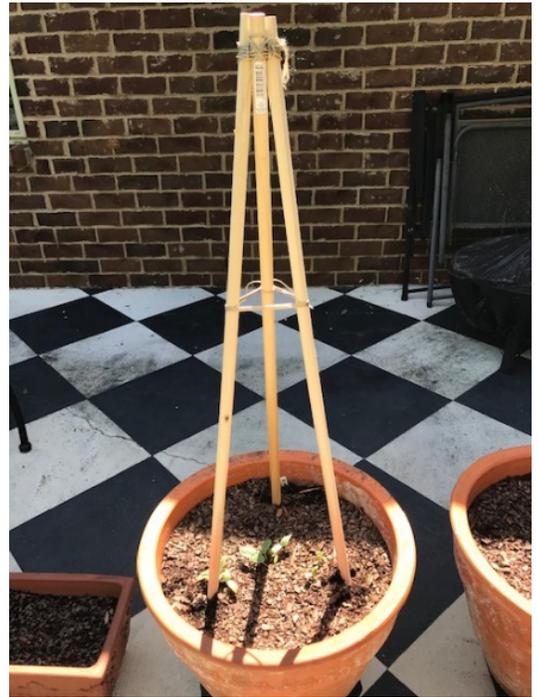


PLEASE NOTE: If you planted the seeds according to the directions in regards to spacing, you probably don't need to do this step.

8. **Continue to water your plants.** Early in the growing season, water plants daily in the morning. Because we live in a warmer climate, you might need to water tomato and cucumber plants twice a day. Tomatoes typically require 1-2 inches of water a week. A good rule for almost all plants is to water when the top inch or two of soil is dry.
9. **If other plants begin to sprout in your containers, they are likely weeds, and you will want to remove them if they look different from the original plants in the container.**
10. **Some vegetables take 60 days to grow, some take up to 90 days.** Being patient is important.

**11. Some plants like tomato plants, may require additional support so that they grow upright.** You can use store bought tomato cages or use 3 wooden dowels and some string to form a pyramid shape that the plants can grow on.

**12. We would love to see your container garden. If you would like to share it with us please post photos on our Facebook page at:**



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