



The Micro Gardener

'Making it Easy to Grow Good Health'

GUIDE TO CHOOSING CROPS FOR POTS

Choosing the Best Location

Before you rush into buying [containers](#), [potting mix](#), [seeds](#) or plants, it's wise to do a little planning to avoid wasting time and money. It's important to [choose safe containers for growing food](#) and select the best location.

Just like we are all different, plants have their preferences too. **Some crops like it warm and sunny, while others prefer cool, shady or moist positions.** There are hardy crops that tolerate [drought or tough dry conditions](#) for long periods e.g. Mediterranean herbs like rosemary, thyme and oregano. Other plants require a **consistently moist soil that is rich in nutrients**, like fruiting crops and leafy greens.

Action Steps

- **Look at all the possible locations** you have available to grow your edible garden. Some may be indoors and others outside. Don't limit where you can place your pots! [Learn more about your microclimates](#).
- **Check your aspect** (N, S, E or W). Use a compass app on your phone or device if you're not sure which way your garden or position faces. You need to know which aspects receive the most sun during the day. In the southern hemisphere, that's the north but in the northern hemisphere it's the south.
- **Write down the sunlight hours for each zone** around your home, indoors and out. Which is the sunniest, warmest position? Are there multiple locations like this? Where do you get direct sunlight vs indirect natural light? Where is the coolest or shadiest area? Match your plant needs to the most ideal locations.

All plants need light to photosynthesise. Some need direct sunlight for most of the day like potted fruit trees and berries. Whilst **most herbs enjoy a sunny, warm position**, there are many edibles that prefer, or will do well in [partial or even full shade](#). So, you may be able to take advantage of small spaces in between other plants you have growing already.

All crops need well-drained soil. As a general rule, **not too dry and not too wet for most!**

Indoor Container Gardens

If you live in an apartment or flat, are renting or sharing a room, without any options for growing outdoors, your best solution is to **look at the possibilities indoors**. [Microgreens](#) and [sprouts](#) are great options for tiny spaces.

If you only have room for a windowsill herb garden or a few pots on a well-lit kitchen bench, that's OK. Even in a tiny space, you can carefully choose edibles that will provide you with great pleasure and many benefits.

Pots for Crops – Short-term vs Long-lived

When considering which crops are best for pots, you need to **think about how long they live**. Some are **annuals** that are short-term plant visitors to your garden. An annual plant completes its life cycle (from seed to flower to seed) in one growing season or a single year. The leaves, roots, stems and flowers of the plant die annually. Annuals produce seeds for the next generation to grow. Examples include [tomatoes](#), [lettuce](#) and [cucumbers](#).

When you [choose a pot](#) for annuals, it's like selecting a temporary home. One they will live in for a relatively short time. Lettuce, rocket and many salad greens have shallow roots and can live together in one large tub 15-20cm deep. Some edibles have a high need for nutrients during their short life like tomatoes and need their own pot so other plants don't compete for food or moisture. They also require a much deeper container (at least 30cm) so they can extend their root system to support lots of delicious fruit.

Then you have **perennials**. These are crops that live from one season to another, growing for several years usually with new herbaceous growth. They don't need replanting and can provide long term value. If the top growth dies down (often during winter), they grow back year after year from their crown, roots, bulbs, or rhizomes below ground. Fruit trees and [turmeric](#) are examples. Many crops will live several years depending on your climate conditions. In warm climates, chillis, eggplant, capsicum and Mediterranean herbs are all long-lived perennials.

When choosing a pot for perennials, you are usually going to choose their permanent residence! Sometimes it may be necessary to 'pot up' a fruit tree into a larger pot each year until it is mature. However, for crops like chillis, eggplant and capsicum you will give them a large deep pot so they are able to establish and produce good quality fruit. If the pot you choose is too shallow, you will limit how big the plant can grow and yield.

A few plants are also **biennials** meaning they live for two years, like parsley. A biennial plant grows leaves and stems during the first year and fruits, bears flowers and dies during the second year.

Make a list of your short and long-term plants so you can choose a suitable container for them to live. One that will accommodate them for their life, at least the first stage. If you are going to raise seeds, you will need a seed raiser. Perhaps a pot, tray or mini greenhouse.

Pollination for Crops in Pots

Fruiting crops (or plants that bear flowers and then fruit e.g. beans, peas, strawberries, chillis and tomatoes) require [pollination](#) in order to produce fruit. Some plants are self-fertile meaning they have both the male and female flowers on the one plant, whilst others need a separate male and female plant nearby so fertilisation can take place. Pollinators (e.g. insects like bees, wasps, flies and butterflies) provide a vital service. As they collect pollen or nectar from the flowers, they cross-pollinate and fertilise the flowers at the same time. Without these insects, you won't get a yield at all or only a poor harvest.

So, if you intend growing food indoors, you will need to choose your fruiting crops carefully and possibly **learn to hand-pollinate**. You may not be able to grow all the food plants you want as some require very specific pollinators, like native bees known as buzz pollinators.

Dig into more Container Gardening Tips to keep learning how to grow an abundant garden in pots.