

Sample Pages of “Easy Container Gardens” by Pamela Crawford

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EASY PATIO Front Cover VEGGIES & HERBS

GORGEOUS, EDIBLE
CONTAINER GARDENS

by Pamela Crawford

Tasty Veggies with Gorgeous Flowers!

Pamela tested 1768 plants
to find out:

Which vegetables & herbs are easiest.

How to make them look good
in containers.

Foolproof growing methods for
the 18 easiest vegetables.

Reviews about Pamela Crawford's
"Container Gardening Series:"

*"This is the first time consumers have
been able to do something special in a
way that is easy and provides instant
gratification."*

*Charlyne Varkonyi-Schaub,
South Florida Sun Sentinel*

*"What puts her book head and shoulders
above the rest is that the author planted
the containers and grew them for an
entire season, evaluating each plant
before putting the combinations in her
book."*

*Susan Banks,
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

Back Cover



The 10 Commandments of ...

This chapter includes a lot of information. The 10 Commandments cut to the chase, summarizing the most important planting and growing information you need to know.

1. Use the Right Potting Mix.

Don't skimp on your potting mix. Good potting mix costs a little bit more, but it makes all the difference. Plants grow larger and live longer with quality potting mix. Do not buy topsoil, garden soil, or potting soil for containers. They are too heavy, and the plants may rot and die quickly.

Look for a brand name you trust. Peters, Miracle Grow, Lambert's, and Fafard (along with many others) offer top-quality, potting mix.

And, by all means, experiment with organics. Try one pot with a new product and see how it does before using more.



2. Buy the Right Fertilizer.

❖ One of the most important components of container growing.

❖ Many, if not most, of the fertilizers you see at big box garden centers won't work well for edibles because they don't include the right elements or they burn the plants. Plants need 16 elements to live, and most fertilizers have just a few.

❖ If the fertilizer's ingredients (shown in small print on the label) don't include boron, copper, iron, manganese, and magnesium, your plants won't do well. I found the fertilizer (shown right) after 10 years of searching. It revolutionized gardening for me. Just sprinkle at planting time according to the directions (available from kinsmangarden.com).

❖ Many potting mixes include fertilizer. I haven't found one yet that lasts long. So, I still apply my brand at planting time.

❖ I haven't experimented with lots of the new, organic fertilizers, but I plan to do that soon.



I like this fertilizer so much I put my name on it! Order from kinsmangarden.com, 1-800-733-4146.

3. Plant in a Pot with a Hole in the Bottom.

If your pots don't have holes in the bottom for drainage, the plants will die (unless the pots were designed for self-watering). Luckily, most pots come with holes in the bottom. If you see one you want to buy that doesn't have a hole, ask the salesperson if he/she will drill them for you. Many garden centers offer that service.



Growing Edibles in Containers

4. Water Properly.

❖ Plants in containers need more water than plants in the ground because their root systems are smaller, and plants store water in their roots.

❖ Water with a gentle stream using a watering wand. This nozzle diffuses the water, so you don't blow the little plants right out of the pots.

❖ When you see signs of wilt or if the soil feels dry to the touch, water. Use your finger to test the soil. Push it into the soil about an inch or so.

❖ Plants use one third to one half as much water in shade than in full sun. Also, plants need more water in high temperatures and wind.

❖ Species of plants vary in their need for water. Peppers, for example, need more water than okra.

❖ Large containers will hold much more water than smaller ones, resulting in less watering.

❖ As plants age, their roots fill the pot, leaving less space for water.

❖ Water thoroughly with each application. The biggest watering mistake people make is to give the plant just a little bit of water. Soak the plant evenly and thoroughly until you see a steady stream of water coming out of the bottom of the pot. A slow soaking is much better than a quick hit with the hose because it allows the roots time to absorb the water.

❖ I use automatic drip systems to water my pots. Lots of kits are available that hook up to the hose. My favorite drip emitter is shown, right.



This is my favorite watering wand. It's adjustable. Set it so the water flows in a gentle stream.

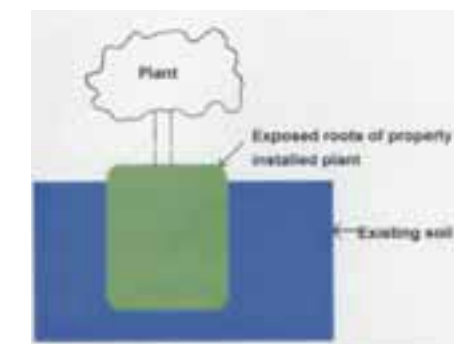


My favorite drip emitter. You can adjust the flow with the screw at the top.

5. Don't Pile Potting Mix Around the Stem of the Plant.

If potting mix or organic mulch comes into contact with the stem of many plants, the stem can rot, killing the plant (except for tomatoes). Plant them slightly higher than the soil level, as shown in the drawing.

We commonly use organic mulch to better hold water on plants in the landscape. However, most vegetables and herbs are too small and can be damaged by mulch.



The 10 Commandments of ...

6. Plant in the Right Season.

I made lots of mistakes by planting vegetables during the wrong season. Some need cool weather to bear fruit, while others have to have hot weather. Unfortunately, some garden centers sell them at the wrong time of year, so take this book with you when you buy plants to lessen any disappointments. Look up a plant profile in the last chapter; then look under 'Hardiness' to find out its temperature tolerances. Although each vegetable is classified by either Warm or Cool season, each one has its own specific preferences, which you will find in the last chapter. Turn to pages 14 and 15 to see when to grow the most popular edibles.

7. Plant in the Right Amount of Light.

Different plants need different amounts of light. Tomatoes likes sun, while mint likes sun or shade. But, how much sun is enough for sun plants? The rule of thumb is a minimum of six hours of direct sun every day. In other words, if your tomato just gets three hours of sun, with shade the rest of the day, it will not do well.

Most herbs and almost all vegetables do well in full sun - six hours per day. Others take morning sun but afternoon shade in summer in very hot areas (like the south or southwest). Mint takes the most shade. See pages 12 and 13 as well as the individual plant profiles in Chapter 6 of this book for more specifics.



8. Harvest at the Right Time.

Each vegetable tastes best when harvested at a particular size, usually when it is young and tender. Since these vegetables hide under the leaves and grow quickly, inspect plants often. Cucumbers, for example, taste bitter if left on the vine too long.

The last chapter of this book tells you the optimum harvest size for each vegetable.



Left: Purple eggplant start turning bronze when they are overripe. Right: Cilantro leaves taste best when they are young and tender.



Growing Edibles in Containers

9. Know How Many Veggies One Plant Produces.

- ❁ Vegetable production varies considerably, based on types of vegetable and container size.
- ❁ Bell peppers produce about 5 to 10 fruit from one pot; whereas, many small peppers produce more than 100 per plant.
- ❁ Since you might not want 72 'Habanero' peppers all at once (in pot shown below), check the last chapter of this book to determine how many fruit each plant will produce before buying them.



I harvested the peppers in this pot shortly after taking this photo. Since vegetables have a tendency to hide behind the leaves, there were many more peppers than I had imagined.



This one picking harvested 149 peppers from this pot - (from left to right: 72 'Habanero,' 34 'Jalapeno,' 28 Chili and 15 'Red Hot Cherry.')



This watermelon only produced 5 fruit.

10. Know the Ultimate Size of the Plant.

One of the biggest problems I had was underestimating the size of the plants I bought. I made many mistakes, particularly with warm-season vegetables, because they grew so much larger than I had ever imagined. To avoid the same mistakes, take this book with you to the garden center. Look up the edible you are considering in the index. All of the edibles I recommend for containers are included in the last chapter with complete plant profiles. Look under "Average Size in a Container," and avoid my mistakes!

What an awful looking arrangement! The large leaves growing on both sides are zucchini labeled as 'dwarf.' No size was given on the garden center label, so I assumed it would form a little vine that would cascade gently over the sides of this pot. Ha! It got HUGE and completely smothered the eggplant in back that was supposed to be the tall centerpiece!



Planting a Small Pot

Planting a Bowl



To remove a plant from the pot, turn the pot upside down over your hand, and let it drop. If it doesn't come out easily, squeeze the sides of the pot together. Once the plant is removed, loosen the roots if they are growing in a circle around the edge of the root ball.



Dip the root ball in a bucket of water to make it easier to fit into the desired spot. Wet roots have the consistency of modeling clay and are easier to mold and reduce when wet.



Place the cabbage along the back edge of the pot, with the top of the root ball a little lower than the edge of the pot. Since this bowl is so low, no potting mix is needed in the bottom of the pot, or the cabbage would have been too tall to fit.



Add potting mix around the center plant, so the tops of the smaller, edge plants will be at the same level as the centerpiece. One of the easiest ways to kill plants (except tomatoes) is piling potting mix around the stems of a plant, which quickly rots it. Better to plant slightly above the grade rather than below it.



After wetting the roots of the edge plants, place them as close as you can in front of and along the sides of the cabbage. Angle them out a bit, so they look pretty along the edge of the pot. I fit 16 violas in this small pot. They came out of an 18-pack, which is considerably cheaper than single pots.



After planting the edge plants, fertilize with the product described on page 36. Place the fertilizer on the potting mix, not on top of the plants. However, if you mess up, the fertilizer will not burn the plants. Use the amount shown on the label for the size pot you are planting.

Place Container Plants Closer than Plants in the Ground

Container gardens are planted much closer than gardens in the ground if you are using vegetables that are somewhat mature, like these ornamental cabbages. This technique was quite difficult for me to get used to when I first started container gardening. My background in landscape architecture had taught me to leave quite a bit of space around plants, so roots had room in which to spread. (This wide spacing is important for permanent plantings because roots of long-lived plantings need space to support the growing plants above ground.)

Container gardens are temporary, with most people using them for decorative, short-lived displays (four to six months). Since most people want quick results, plant as close as you can in your containers. And, yes, they live and flourish! One mantra of experienced container gardeners is "Jam them in!," which is easy once you get the hang of it.

The only time to vary this practice is when, on planting day, your centerpiece vegetable is actually shorter than the surrounding flowers. Although the centerpiece is the tallest plant in the arrangement, it is often difficult to find larger sizes in garden centers. For example, you want to plant an eggplant that will grow four feet tall, and surround it by begonias, that will grow to eight inches tall. The largest eggplant you can find at your garden center is five inches tall, and the begonias are larger. Plant the eggplant first, alone in the pot. Give it a few weeks until it is double the flower height; and then, add the flowers around it. This practice keeps the flowers from smothering the eggplant.



Planting Tall, Thin Containers

Maximize Square Foot Harvest

I tried tall, thin containers because they take up very little floor space. Many growers told me they would not work for tomatos because the roots grew horizontally. When they hit the sides of the pot, the plant would stop growing.

I was thrilled to discover that didn't happen. My tomatoes, and all the veggies and herbs I tried in tall, thin containers, took off like Jack and the Beanstalk in these pots.

This planter, available from independent garden centers (ask them to order Tall Milan from Anamese) is 35" H x 15.5" W, and only takes up about two square feet of floor space. We harvested this pot shortly after taking the photo. It yielded 72 tomatoes from one harvest. This is an heirloom tomato, 'Yellow Pear.' It produces fruit for quite a while, so your two square feet would have a fantastic harvest. A wild-growing tomato, I trimmed to keep it neat.

What You Put in the Bottom of the Pot

To avoid clogging the drainage hole with potting mix, put the pot liner (piece of weed cloth covered by wire mesh or screening) on the bottom, followed by gravel. Use small gravel, with pebbles that are larger than the grid in the pot liner so the gravel doesn't fall out of the drainage hole.

I use at least six to eight inches of gravel, if I'm not concerned with wind. If wind could be a problem, I'll use a whole bag, which is 50 pounds. Once, in a waterfront location subject to wind, I used 100 pounds of gravel.

Watch out for Wind

I've been growing plants in tall, thin plants for 25 years, most of that time in Florida. I never once had one blow over in high winds, and we had more high winds than I would care to remember!

If wind could be a problem, I would use a whole bag of gravel in the bottom of the pot before planting, which is 50 pounds. Once, in a waterfront location subject to wind, I used 100 pounds of gravel.

If you are in an area threatened by high winds, particularly hurricane force winds, I recommend placing the container flat on the ground or patio. Winds are much lower at ground level than they are just a few feet above it. You might lose a little potting mix, but the plants and pot have a much better chance of survival, unless something falls on them.

Do you Have to Fill with New Potting Mix with each Planting?

Good-quality potting mix is expensive. When I first plant the pot, I fill the whole pot, from gravel level to about an inch or so below the level of the top. The next time I plant, I leave the old potting mix in the pot for the bottom 12 to 18 inches and put new potting mix in the rest.

However, I replace all the potting mix if the old mix is filled with roots all the way to the bottom.



Use Large, Attractive Pots



The most common problem I see with growing tomatoes is choosing a pot that is too small. For medium to large plants, I prefer pots measuring at least 20" to 24" in diameter if they are short (20" to 24" tall). For tall pots, chose one at least 15" wide and 3' tall. For dwarfs, like 'Bonnie Grape,' I use pots measuring at least 14" wide. 'Bonnie Grape' does well planted in the side holes of a side-planted basket but doesn't produce as large of a yield.

Many people see the little tomato plant at the garden center and can't imagine that it will ever grow large enough to fill a huge pot. But, it does... and quickly! Remember that some tomatoe plants grow as large as 10 feet tall!

Use Attractive Supports



Tomatoes need supports, so they won't fall over. Tomato cages are sold for this purpose in many garden centers. They are ugly! Beautiful tomatoes need beautiful supports. My favorite supports are obelisks that are readily available online. Most of them come in black. I spray-painted these.

I place the obelisks in the pot right after I plant the tomatoes. Then, I plant flowers around it, if desired.

I also use trellises, as shown above. Those trellises and pots are available from kinsmangarden.com

Trim to Keep Them Neat

Some tomatoes are determinite and others indeterminate. Determinate varieties grow smaller and neater, and their fruit matures quickly (a month or two) at the ends of their branches. They require less trimming than the indeterminate ones. Indeterminate varieties keep growing and producing tomatoes throughout the growing season. They have a wilder growth habit than the determinate but can easily be trimmed. I used both quite successfully.



Yellow pair tomatoes are determinate, heirloom tomatoes. The first one I ever planted (shown above, left) was an experiment for me. I just let it grow wild to see what would happen. I ended up trimming it occasionally, and it did quite well in that huge pot.

I tried another experiment, shown right. I wanted to see if I could get a good harvest if I trimmed it quite small. It worked beautifully!

Choose Tomatoes with a Neat, Natural Growth Habit

Some tomatoes are bred to look good in containers. They have a neater growth habit than many of the heirlooms. But some of them don't taste as good as the older varieties. Two great container vegetables that offer good taste and a neat growth habit are the 'Patio' (shown, near right) and 'Husky Cherry Red' (shown, far right).



Tomatos and Herbs

This is one of my all-time favorite container combinations. It's simple, beautiful, and produced large harvests. Both the 'Patio' tomato and basil grew quite large because of the large pots. Both also produced bountiful harvests, much larger than they would have produced in smaller containers.



'Patio' Tomato
1 plant from a 4" pot



Basil
1 plant from a 4" pot



Celosia
8 plants from a Multipack



Curly Parsley
1 plant from a 4" Pot

Cultural Information

Light: Light shade to full sun

Season: Spring through fall for most warmer areas. This plant combination takes temperatures from about 55 - 60 degrees to the low 100's and is equally happy in either extreme.

Lifespan: The 'Patio' tomato is determinate, meaning it produces all its fruit at once by the time it's 2 or 3 months old. Replace it with another tomato at that time because the rest of the plants should keep going until the first frost of fall.

Care: Fertilize on planting day with a slow-release mix described on page 8. Repeat if the leaves look yellowish or washed-out, although the fertilizer should last from 6 - 9 months months.

Trim the basil to keep it looking tight.

Water: Water thoroughly if the plants show signs of wilt, or the soil feels dry when you push your fingertip into the potting mix. I watered this one every day in mid summer (after it was about a month old) and every other day in cooler weather. See page 9 to learn about watering shortcuts.

Troubleshooting: No problems at all

Planting Plan: Easy. Plant the tomato, parsley, and celosia in the the center of the pot. Plant the basil along the back of the pot and tuck some flowers in front. Be sure to plant in good-quality, potting mix, not garden soil, top soil, or potting soil, which can kill your plants.

Container: The largest pot is huge, about 26 inches across. The smaller pots are from Pacific Home and Garden, with the largest measuring 18 inches across.

If you can't find these exact containers, check out local garden centers to see the latest glazes. They are getting more diverse each year!



Mix Pots of Different Colors

Almost all of the groups of pots in this book are the same color. I experimented with mixing pots of different colors in this grouping and the one on page 57. This arrangement features two pots of Husky Cherry Red tomatoes (because my friends and I consume a lot of them) and one pot of ‘Cowhorn’ peppers. Zinnias accent the edge.



'Cowhorn' Pepper
1 plant from a 4" pot



'Husky Cherry Red' Tomato
2 plants from 4" pots



'Macarenia' Zinnias
32 plants from a 4" pots

Cultural Information

Light: Full sun, at least 6 hours per day

Season: Spring through fall for most warmer areas. These plants take temperatures from about 40 degrees to the low 100's and are equally happy in either extreme. Peppers and tomatoes bear fruit at temperatures between 65 and 90 degrees.

Lifespan: 5 - 6 months for the peppers and zinnias. The tomatoes will start to decline about 2 - 3 months after planting. Replace them with fresh plants at that time.

Care: Fertilize on planting day with a slow-release mix described on page 8. Repeat if the leaves look yellowish or washed-out, although the fertilizer should last from 6 - 9 months.

Water: Water thoroughly if the plants show signs of wilt, or the soil feels dry when you push your fingertip into the potting mix. I watered this one every day (after it was about a month old) in mid summer and every other day in cooler weather. See page 9 to learn about watering shortcuts.

Troubleshooting: No problems at all

Planting Plan: Easy. Simply plant a pepper or tomato in the center of the pot, and plant zinnias along the front edge. Be sure to plant in good-quality, potting mix, not garden soil, top soil, or potting soil, which can kill your plants.

Container: From Pacific Home & Garden. Their pottery is often found in independent garden centers.

Best Time to Pick: Be sure to check behind the leaves frequently because peppers and some tomatoes hide! The more you pick, the more the plant produces. They are ready to eat when they turn a sharp shade of red.



Easiest Vegetables

Tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers are three of the easiest vegetables I grew. This grouping features ‘Patio’ tomatoes, ‘Cubanelle’ peppers, and eggplant. Melampodium is tucked in along the edge. The tall, blue columns allow maximum harvest in the smallest space.



‘Patio’ Tomato
1 plant from a 4” pot



Eggplant
1 plant from a 4” pot



‘Cubanelle’ Pepper
1 plant from a 4” pot



Melampodium
18 plants from multipacks

Cultural Information

Light: Full sun, at least 6 hours per day

Season: Spring through fall for most warmer areas. These plants take temperatures from about 40 degrees to the low 100’s and are equally happy in either extreme. Peppers and tomatoes bare fruit at temperatures between 65 and 90 degrees. Eggplant need 100 to 140 days of temperatures between 70 to 90 degrees.

Lifespan: 5 - 6 months for the vegetables. The tomatoes will start to decline about 2 - 3 months after planting. Replace them with fresh plants at that time.

Care: Fertilize on planting day with a slow-release mix described on page 8. Repeat if the leaves look yellowish or washed-out, although the fertilizer should last from 6 - 9 months months.

Water: Water thoroughly if the plants show signs of wilt, or the soil feels dry when you push your fingertip into the potting mix. I watered this one every day (after it was about a month old) in mid summer and every other day in cooler weather. See page 9 to learn about watering shortcuts.

Troubleshooting: No problems at all

Planting Plan: Easy. Simply plant a vegetable in the center of the pot, and plant melampodium along the front edge. Be sure to plant in good-quality, potting mix, not garden soil, top soil, or potting soil, which can kill your plants.

Container: Found in independent garden centers

Best Time to Pick: Be sure to check behind the leaves frequently because peppers and some tomatoes hide! The more you pick, the more the plants produce. They are ready to eat when they turn a sharp shade of red. The eggplants are ready when they have stopped growing and have a glossy skin.



Herbs & Flowers Go Vertical!

This combination of herbs and flowers hung on the wall of my patio garden, above the table. I used the herbs frequently for meals I served on the table. The plants loved the bottom watering from the self-watering planter. What a convenient and pretty way to grow.



Sweet Basil
2 plants from 4" pots



Melampodium
8 plant forms 4" pots



Gomphrena
2 plants from a 4" pot



Creeping Jenny
6 plants from a multipack



Rosemary
2 plants from 4" pots



Boxwood Basil
2 plants from 4" pots

Cultural Information

Light: At least 4 - 5 hours of full sun

Season: Spring through fall for most warmer areas.

Lifespan: 3 - 4 months in this container

Care: Fertilize on planting day with a slow-release mix described on page 8. Repeat if the leaves look yellowish or washed-out, although the fertilizer should last from 6 - 9 months months.

Trim the creeping Jenny to keep it looking neat.

Water: This Lechuza self-watering planter has a water level indicator located on the front corner. When this indicator falls below the 'min' level, refill the water reservoir to 'max.' These self-watering containers require less water than other containers.

Troubleshooting: No problems at all

Planting Plan: Top planter: Plant a sweet basil in the center back. Surround it with the melampodium, gomphrena, and creeping Jenny. Bottom planter: Plant a rosemary in the center back. Surround it with 'Boxwood' basil and the same ornamental plants as the top planter. Be sure to plant in good-quality, potting mix, not garden soil, top soil, or potting soil, which can kill your plants.

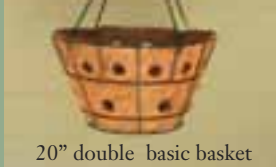
Container: Lechuza's Balconera Cottage 50. The bottom pot is the Balconera Cottage 80.

Best Time to Pick: Since these herbs are used for flavoring (found in the leaves), trim any time. If the rosemary grows so tall it hits the upper planter, trim as needed.





All You Can Eat Herbs



20" double basic basket

I found some trays of mixed herbs called ‘All You Can Eat’ in a garden center. I loved them! I just alternated them in the side holes of the basket, planted lavender and salvia in the middle, and tucked a few of the mixed herbs around the edge. The basket is large enough to support the plants for a whole season - a full seven months - with no work other than watering!

I planted them in May and took this photo in June. To see how they looked in October, see pages 80 - 81.



Lavender
1 plant from a
6" pot



Annual Salvia
10 plants from a
multipack



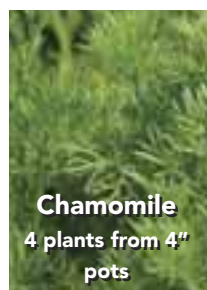
Mint
4 plants from
4" pots



Tricolor Sage
5 plants from
4" pots



Golden Oregano
5 plants from
4" pots



Chamomile
4 plants from 4"
pots



Catnip
4 plants from
4" pots



Purple Sage
5 plants from
4" pots



Silver Edged Thyme
5 plants from
4" pots

Cultural Information

Light: Full sun

Season: Spring through fall for most warmer areas. This plant combination takes temperatures from about 60 degrees to the low 90's and is equally happy in either extreme.

Lifespan: In this container, 5 - 7 months.

Care: Fertilize on planting day with a slow-release mix described on page 8. Repeat if the leaves look yellowish or washed-out, although the fertilizer should last from 6 - 9 months.

Trim any plants as needed to keep the arrangement looking tight.

Water: Water thoroughly if the plants show signs of wilt, or the soil feels dry when you push your fingertip into the potting mix I watered this one every day in mid summer (after it was about a month old) and every other day in cooler weather. See page 9 to learn more about watering.

Troubleshooting: No problems at all

Planting Plan: It might be hard for you to believe, but planting this container was easy. I simply alternated the seven small herbs around the side holes. Then, I planted the lavender in the center and added some salvia around it. I tucked some more of the small herbs along the edge, and it was done!

Container: Kinsman's 20" double basic basket, side-planted. The 36" border column is also sold as a kit from www.kinsmangarden.com.

