

# Diggin' in the Dirt: Container Vegetables

By Chip Bubl  
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Extension Service - Columbia County

offering garden plants and other garden related products. Please carpool when possible.

Voice for more information.

## OSU Master Gardener's™ Spring Garden Fair: Saturday, April 30th

The OSU/Columbia County Master Gardener's™ Spring Garden Fair at St. Helens High School Commons, 2375 Gable Rd St Helens, OR, will be held on April 30th from 9:00 am – 3:00 pm. The OSU Master Gardener's™ will sell roughly 5,000 tomatoes in more than 30 varieties for only \$1.50 per plant, provide tomato and general gardening information, offer raffle tickets with hourly prize drawings, and have a number of educational displays. There will also be dozens of local vendors

## Watch for Vernonia's own Spring Garden Fair on Saturday, May 7th!

The Vernonia Community Garden Group will be putting on the third annual Spring Garden Fair at the Vernonia High School Commons on Saturday, May 7th from 9:00 am -3:00 pm. There will be certified organic tomato plants for sale as well as other garden plants and garden related items from local and regional vendors. There will be an information table staffed with Master Gardener's™ to answer your garden questions. Note the posters going up around town and watch the Vernonia's

### Container vegetables

- Why grow plants in containers?
  - You are in an apartment and don't have space for a garden
  - You have a deck or a patio you want to grow plants on
  - You may be moving and want to take the plants with you
  - Kids enjoy watching plants grow in containers
  - You may want to grow tender plants that will need to be moved indoors in the winter
  - Container plants may be less work than a regular garden
- What about container kind/size?
  - Size: A large plant like a tomato needs at least a 3-gallon container. Smaller plants (like lettuce, herbs, and flowers) may be able to use smaller containers.
  - Type of container: The most important thing is that the container must have drainage holes. You can use a 5-gallon bucket if you make enough good-sized drainage holes in the bottom of the bucket. Plastic containers hold more moisture, which means that they may not need to be watered as often as clay pots but they can become waterlogged more easily if they are over-watered. This can cause the plants to die!
- What do you fill the container with?
  - Don't fill the container with soil. Roots need oxygen to work and soil used as a container mix will fill with water leaving little oxygen in the mix. The plants suffer and then die.
  - Buy a potting mix for containers. This is usually a combination of peat moss and/or wood fiber and perlite or vermiculite. The mix will give your plants proper root aeration. A small amount of soil can be added if mixed well and is not more than about 10% of the total mix by volume. Potting mixes can be reused if there were no disease issues.
  - Generally, you fill the container about 1/2 to 2/3 with potting mix before transplanting. Then put in the plant and add more mix around the sides until the mix comes to about an inch of the top of the container. Water the plants well after transplanting. You can start plants from seed directly in the container but you must be careful not to over or under water them in the critical first three weeks after planting. There are some summer squash (zucchini, yellow crookneck, etc.) that are bred to grow in small spaces and do very well in containers. Bush beans will grow without support but pole beans will

- need some type of trellis or netting at least 4 feet tall. Tomatoes also will need some support (like a tomato cage) to do well. Peppers love containers!
- How do you feed and care for plants?
  - Most potting mixes don't have much fertilizer in them. You can buy a water soluble product like Miracle Grow™, Schultz™ or fish fertilizer and mix it according to instructions. Then once a week you can water with a fertilizer solution instead of plain water. This should give your plants what they need. You can put slow-release fertilizers like Osmocote™ into the mix.
  - Watering is an art. The plants shouldn't be allowed to dry out nor should they be waterlogged. With a little practice, you will get it right. If you have a moisture meter to test the soil, it will help you get the feel for how often the containers need water.
  - Watch where you place containers. The hottest place around your house is the southwest corner. On very hot days, you can "toast" your plants, especially if there is some reflected heat from the house wall. Place containers where they get a lot of sun but get good air circulation as well.

**Take excess produce to the food bank, senior centers, or community meals programs. Cash donations to buy food are also greatly appreciated.**

**The Extension Service offers its programs and materials equally to all people.**

### Free newsletter

The Oregon State University Extension office in Columbia County publishes a monthly newsletter on gardening and farming topics (called County Living) written/edited by yours truly. All you need to do is ask for it and it will be mailed to you. Call (503) 397-3462 to be put on the list. Alternatively, you can sign up for email notification of when to find the latest edition on the web at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/>.

### Contact information for the Extension office

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