

## **Gardens Can Provide Some Food Security**

Just like many of you, I'm having difficulty wrapping my mind around how quickly our lives have changed in a very short period of time. Seeing the panic and chaos that's happening around us can be concerning. Now more than ever, it might be the time for folks to think about becoming more self-sufficient and grow some of their own food.

I have been in contact with a couple of our local suppliers and have seen social media posts that they are stocked with garden seed and supplies. Like many other local retailers, I know they are willing to work with you if you do not feel comfortable going inside the business. Just give them a call and arrange for outside pick-up.

If you are reading this and thinking to yourself that you have never grown anything in your life and just don't think it's possible, let me assure you that it is possible. Even for the most novice! You might be thinking that you don't have space for a garden, or maybe you don't have a tiller or other equipment. Don't let that stop you because almost all vegetables can be grown in containers.

The containers don't have to be anything fancy. Literally, anything that can hold soil and have drain holes drilled in the bottom can be used. Containers that are 16 to 24 inches in diameter work well. Containers less than 12 inches are probably too small – except for lettuces. The most important component of growing vegetables in a container is getting the right potting media. Potting mixes are ideal (instead of soil from your yard). The components are lightweight and hold water and oxygen much better. Make certain that you don't forget to drill some drainage holes into the bottom of the container.

Fertilizer should be added at planting time and mixed into the soil. If you want to go the organic route, mix blood meal or bone meal into the soil before planting. If you use a synthetic fertilizer, add a slow-release type when preparing the container.

Another benefit to growing vegetables in containers – you don't have to fight the weather quite as much. Right now, traditional garden soils are way too wet to even think about planting. But with the container system, you can keep them dry inside a garage until you are ready to plant.

Early spring is the ideal time to plant cool season vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, radish, onions, carrots and potatoes. All can be easily grown in containers, even potatoes!

Gardening is a great stress reliever. It also allows for good social distancing. If you have kids at home, gardening is the perfect activity to get them outside to enjoy some fresh air and sunshine, all while learning at the same time!

Here's where I come in. I have lots of resource material to help you. In addition, I'm always available by phone, e-mail or social media to answer your questions. Don't be afraid to ask! In Extension, we say there are no "dumb" questions! I am here to help you in any way that I can. The Extension mission continues. We are committed to being innovative to connect you with research-based resources and education. We appreciate your patience as we all navigate the challenges associated with this time.

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