



## *Five P's for growing vegetables in containers 2021*



**TITLE:** The fourth “P” is PAMPER

**Description:** Once your seeds have sprouted – or you have transplanted seedlings, the container will need to be watered daily and fertilized regularly. This is “pampering”.

**Objective(s):** Learn how to water to avoid plant disease and how often to fertilize based on what you are growing.

**WHAT:** Vegetables need water and nutrients to survive, and need timely applications of both in order to produce high-quality produce.

**WHY:** Container gardening is different than in-ground gardening in many ways. The medium in the container is quite different from the native soil, so you will have to provide the nutrients via fertilizer. Containers also dry out faster and will need to be watered daily.

**WHEN:** Watering: Until you get to know your garden, test the soil in your containers once a day or so by feeling for moisture with your fingertip slightly below the soil surface. When the soil feels dry, water your plants thoroughly. Proper watering is essential for a successful container garden and one watering per day is usually adequate. If it is a particularly warm and/or breezy day, the container may need a second watering.

Fertilizing: When we filled the container with mix, we had a small amount of fertilizer in the mix. That was sufficient to get the seeds started and for the plants to produce their first and second set of true leaves. Now, fertilizer will be needed every other week.

**WHERE:** The container may have been indoors (garage) while waiting for seeds to sprout. But once the seeds have sprouted, the container needs to be outdoors as the newly emerged plants need sunshine. And if you have set in transplants, they definitely need to be outdoors.

**HOW:** Watering: Avoid wetting the foliage of plants since wet leaves will encourage plant diseases. Give your plants water until the excess runs out the bottom of the containers. Don't ever let them sit in water—if you have dishes under the containers, empty them after watering. If you used a mix that has water-holding gels, remember that they hold a lot of water (100 times their weight) and may create “wet spots” that could drown young roots. If the top of the container is drying out too quickly, consider adding a light layer of mulch (compost, straw, pine needles, grass clippings)

Fertilizing: Water soluble fertilizers are easiest for containers. Always follow the application directions on the label. And while your plants are small, make the solution half-strength. As the plants get larger, you can transition to full-strength. On the days that you apply the fertilizer solution, you will still water your containers – just not quite as much.

## SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Check your containers EVERY day to keep the top inch moist while seeds are starting.
- Be very careful in watering so that you don't wash seeds or young sprouts out of the soil.
- Don't ever let your containers sit in trays of water.
- Your finger is your best moisture meter.
- Start fertilizing, using half-strength solution, after seeds have sprouted.
- Once seedlings have several sets of true leaves, transition to full-strength solutions.
- Follow the instructions on the fertilizer package for frequency of application. This can vary from weekly to bi-weekly.
- Start watching for pests on your plants. They may, or may not, show up to feast on your container veggies. Call the Ask-a-Master Gardener helpline (phone # below) for advice.



*NOTE: Radish and carrot seeds were sown on March 1. Radish seeds were the first to sprout – appearing on March 8. The container had been in the garage, as there were several nights when the temperatures were in the mid-20's. (In the house, they would have sprouted in 3-4 days). Now that they have sprouted and the temperatures have warmed, the container is outside – where it will stay. Carrot seeds take longer to germinate, up to 21 days.*

## Additional Resources / References:

“Vegetable Gardening in Containers”, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, bulletin EHT-062, <https://cdn-ext.agnet.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EHT-062-vegetable-gardening-in-containers.pdf>

“Growing Vegetables in Containers”, Gardening Solutions-University of Florida, <https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/growing-vegetables-in-containers.html>

“Watering - Successful Container Gardens”, University of Illinois Extension, <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/containergardening/watering.cfm>

“Watering and Fertilizing Containers” University of Maryland Extension Home and Garden Info Center, <https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/watering-and-fertilizing-containers>

Knox County Master Gardeners website: [www.knoxcountymastergardener.org](http://www.knoxcountymastergardener.org)

Knox County Master Gardeners Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KnoxCountyMG>

Ask-a-Master Gardener / Knox County Extension Helpline: (865) 215-2340

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