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## Greening Up a Small Space Pt I - Containers

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### It's All About the Container

When greening up a small space, finding the right container for your plants is like picking the right pan for your dinner. It has to be the correct size! A good rule of thumb is that a pot's diameter should be 1/3 to 1/2 the height of the plant. It almost goes without saying that you won't be having many tall plants, unless you want a jungle look rather than a simple accent.

When caring for the plant, use a good quality potting medium, not potting soil, and - for best results - an organic, water-soluble fertilizer.

### Voila! - now you are a gardener!

Plants can be grown in a teacup, a hanging basket, or a 5-gallon bucket. Any size container can be used, but successful growing requires an adequate volume of soil for the size of the plant, and excellent drainage. Some thought should also be given to weight and portability; there's no need to throw your back out every time you move a plant. I prefer using saucers with wheels (they come in all sizes) for floor plants, and individual pots on a waterproof tray for my windowsills.



### Indoors

A window of greenery is cheery. A potted plant on the floor in front of the window, with a sill full of pots and a few hanging plants, all capture the light to really complete a room. Plus, they're an inexpensive window treatment. Pick the plants to suit both available light as well as how the room is used.

In the kitchen, what cook wouldn't love to have a windowsill overflowing with fresh herbs? They provide the perfect accent to turn even a mundane dish into a culinary delight. Plus, they're easy and rewarding to grow and use.

Combination pots may look nice with the contrasting foliage artfully arranged, but they soon become a mess. Growth and moisture requirements differ for each plant. For your herb collection think individual 5" or 6" pots on a waterproof tray. (I prefer unglazed clay pots because they breathe, but plastic is acceptable.)

As plants fade and tastes change you can mix and match the selection without disturbing the others. As a matter of fact, forget combination pots entirely - whether you want to grow flowers, greenery or food, individual pots are always better.



### Outdoors

Gardeners with a patio or deck- and deep pockets - will like the [Food Map Container](#) (\$245 & \$255), a large window box on wheels. Made from recycled materials, it's large enough for a salad garden - or a glorious floral display. The FMC is designed to let water drain quickly to keep plants from being damaged by sitting in water, while allowing for the soil to stay evenly moist. It's 33" long, 15" wide and 14" deep, holding about 4 cubic feet of potting mix. It's available in two heights: a two-foot high model for children, or two and a half for adults. (Either height would work for someone confined to a wheel chair.) The Food Map Container is ideal for wheeling around to follow the sun, hiding a neighbor's view, and rolling out of the way when you entertain.

Self watering Terrazza Trough Planters of a similar size but without casters are available at [Gardener's Supply Company](#) for \$100. In a sunny location you can plant them with tomato, cucumber and peppers for a satisfying salad garden. In sun or shade plant impatiens, decorative grass and trailing vines to deliver a colorful vertical display.



### General advice

- Use a good quality potting medium, not potting soil, and - for best results - a water soluble fertilizer.
- For cheap chic, I've been known to transform the large olive oil cans as urban pots; simply punch small drainage holes in the bottom. For larger plants, those 5 gallon buckets you can get from contractors and bakeries work fine as they are, but can be painted or applied to look even better.
- It's important to have a secure hanger properly anchored into the wall or ceiling for hanging baskets. There's nothing worse than having greenery come crashing down on you, other plants or treasured mementos.
- I'd suggest making it organic if you are growing anything to be eaten, such as herbs or vegetables.
  - *next in the series - growing plants from seed*

*Richard Frisbie, FOOD Correspondent:*

You can read all of my articles <http://rfrisbie.gather.com/> or find them with those of the other Food Correspondents, plus celebrity chef content and plenty of other Foodies at <http://foodtalk.gather.com>

**BIO** - Richard Frisbie writes culinary travel articles, is a columnist for his local newspapers, and is a regular contributor to the many Hudson Valley, Catskill Mountain and other regional New York publications. Online, he writes frequent articles for EDGE publications, Globalfoodie, and Travel Lady, as well as Gather.

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## Comments: 16

[Deborah Sloan](#) Jan 27, 2010, 4:11pm EST

You are so right! Fabulous Post!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 27, 2010, 4:40pm EST

Thanks Deborah, a few warm days and I'm already thinking Spring gardens.

[phil w.](#) Jan 27, 2010, 4:16pm EST

Great post ,spring will get here someday !

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 27, 2010, 4:41pm EST

I'm hurrying Spring as fast as I can - thanks phil!

[Amanda "middle of nowhere" C.](#) Jan 27, 2010, 5:24pm EST

Good article...the box made me laugh!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 27, 2010, 5:37pm EST

so practical, but so expensive!

[Sheryl O.](#) Jan 27, 2010, 5:24pm EST

Hmm...we're planning our garden now. We always have a couple of window boxes of fresh herbs on the deck outside the kitchen for easy access - we found hangers that go over the railing of the deck. I like the roll-a-tub thingy, though. That would be really handy. Too bad it's so darn expensive! It's recycled for cryin' out loud. Why so much?

I have found that I should not be trusted with indoor plants. I quickly kill them - it's a gift, I guess. For their sake, I will simply *imagine* taking your excellent advice and having a beautiful home full of potted beauties.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 27, 2010, 5:40pm EST

That's a real niche market item for the high-end crowd - I'd just use a pot!  
It's funny - my rosemary died (again) after having it just a month or so, but my trees and shrubs (indoors) are thriving. I can grow most things anywhere, but those few, such as rosemary, still elude my talents. Hope Springs eternal.

[Sheryl O.](#) Jan 27, 2010, 5:48pm EST

I agree - rosemary is finicky. Methinks it requires just the right amt of water - if too much, it gets sick, if too little, it turns into a Christmas tree in late January.

My brother had a huge potted one in NJ - brought it in for the winter. The thing was almost 4 feet high. I only put a small plant or two in the window box during the summer and let them fade away in the fall. They do seem to last longer after the first frosty mornings, though. I think they just like playing with our heads.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 27, 2010, 6:00pm EST

The unheated storage area at Hudson Valley Desserts has several in the south window. They surprise me in their hardiness, and then die in my kitchen!

[Sheryl O.](#) Jan 27, 2010, 5:49pm EST

*"It's important to have a secure hanger properly anchored into the wall or ceiling for hanging baskets. There's nothing worse than having greenery come crashing down on you, other plants or treasured mementos."*

That one kinda made me laugh. :)

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 27, 2010, 6:04pm EST

Glad to make you laugh! It was a funnier line before a less risqué rewrite, moving the plant into the kitchen from the bedroom . . .

[Larry H.](#) Jan 27, 2010, 8:37pm EST

thanks for sharing..

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 28, 2010, 11:55am EST

Thank you Larry, my pleasure. Before my incarnation as a baker. even before my incarnation as a publisher and bookseller, I managed a very progressive Nursery & Garden Center in Woodstock NY. At heart I am always a gardener.

[Digital Diva S.](#) Jan 28, 2010, 10:33am EST

What a super post. I love my indoor plants and look forward to spring to plant outside.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 28, 2010, 11:58am EST

Thanks Digital, plants are so rewarding. I have a sweet olive in bloom all year round (about 4 feet high & wide) just inside the front door. I got used to it, and no one ever mentions it, but someone coming in for the Holidays reminded me by saying as she walked in the door - "OH! I'd forgotten how much I love the smell of your house!"

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