

Vegetables and Herbs to Grow on Balconies

Mary Brittain from The Cottage Gardener suggests the following vegetables and herbs that grow well on balconies. The Cottage Gardener is an heirloom seedhouse and plant nursery in south-central Ontario —

www.cottagegardener.com

Container balcony gardening is very different from regular gardening in a few key ways:

- There is less soil available to the plants and less space for them to grow in. Plants only grow as large as their roots are allowed to spread. The larger the plant the more its roots need to spread. And you don't want your plants spreading all over your balcony.
- It's a drier environment for the plants. The soil in containers dries out more quickly than in the ground since the walls of the container are exposed to air and light.
- Balcony gardens tend to have windier environments. Often there is a lot of sun with little shade.
- Also, since the balcony garden does not lend itself to overwintering herbs, best to stick with annual varieties.

So...plants that do better in containers on balconies tend to be those that have contained growth and those that can handle more adverse growing conditions. Most herbs fit these criteria since they like loads of sun and are pretty drought-tolerant. Particular ones would include basil (all varieties), German Chamomile, cilantro, parsley, salad burnet, summer savoury, sweet marjoram and summer thyme.

Veggie varieties that are better candidates for containers include: bush beans (pole, if you can add poles); beets; Little Finger carrot; Little Fingers eggplant; most greens - lettuce, Dwarf Blue Curled Scotch Kale, mustard greens, cress, purslane, collards; onions; Dwarf Grey Sugar Pea; most peppers, although some, like Tollie's, Aurora and Nosegay are very small and can be grown in the smallest containers; Red Malabar spinach (if trellised). Galilee spinach; radishes; swiss chard; turnips; tomatoes – determinate* ones only, such as Black Sea Man, Red Burbank, Nebraska Wedding. (*Note: determinate tomatoes stop growing at

about 3 feet; indeterminate tomatoes keep growing until they reach 6 feet or so and would be unwieldy for a balcony).

For vegetables, it is important to use the right-sized containers. Root crops like beets, carrots, radishes and turnips need deeper containers according to how deep the roots grow. Tomatoes grow larger than herbs so would need larger containers that hold more soil. This is because the larger the plant is, generally, the more nourishment it needs and, since it draws its nourishment from the soil, the more soil it needs to draw from.

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