

Choosing The Best Soil For Containers

It seems that no matter what type of gardening we do, whether flower or vegetable, there is always an opportunity to plant something in a container. And, as with any plantings, the proper soil is tantamount to success. It has everything to do with healthy plants and how much they yield. So, let's take a look at the variety of soil options and how to apply them for success.

When planting in a container you will need a soil that allows for:

- A dwelling for water
- A place to keep nutrients intact
- Area for root gas exchange
- An area for roots to connect and hold on to

And, by the way, when did all of the different types of container soil hit the planet anyway? It seems to have been a gradual change, but it can certainly make it somewhat confusing. So, to help, the following are various soil-related options you can find at your home and garden center that are designed for containers to enhance drainage, help with moisture retention, and enhance aeration.

- **Sphagnum Peat Moss:** To help hold water moisture and improves aeration
- **Perlite and Vermiculite:** Both add air space to the soil for better root health; they are essential for improving drainage in your gardening containers
- **Compost:** It provides organic material that contains essential nutrients for your plants

Raised Bed Soil

- Best for vegetables, fruits, flowers, and herbs
- Make certain it is all natural
- No mixing required – just add your seeds or plant material
- Start a feeding routine about 30 days after planting

Original Gardening Boxes

- 10-12” deep
- Tried-and-true planting boxes
- The perfect depth to house the most popular vegetables

Herb Planting Boxes

- 7-8” deep
- Good for planting basil, thyme, oregano, mint, sage, & other herbs

Vegetable Planting Boxes

- 15+” deep
- Great option for root vegetables that have substantial soil requirements
- Use to plant carrots, beets, onions, turnips, and radishes

Tomato Planters

- 11” deep
- Perfect for tomato plants
- Consider purchasing a tomato-growing kit that provides everything you need to grow ripe, juicy tomatoes

Soil depth depends on the plant's roots. Consider the following guidelines:

- **Small plants need 6-8" of soil**
- **Medium-sized plants need 10-12" of soil**
- **Large plants (i.e., tomatoes) need 18+" of soil**

Some gardeners think taking soil from their yard and placing it in a container is a good option. **It is not!** Because . . .

Compaction: Topsoil is coarse and heavy, often including stones and clay. When used in gardening containers, it compacts too much which reduces both aeration and drainage - both are disastrous for plant health.

Diseases: Natural soil generally contains weeds and other seeds, not to mention disease-causing pathogens. Using soil from your yard will pass unwanted items into your containers and onto your plants.

Nutrients: Topsoil typically falls short of nutrients for your plants. It may contain some from decaying matter but, unless you have added more, it does not contain nutrient levels needed for potted plants.

Going forward, consider refreshing and replenishing your potting soil from time to time. Unopened bags of potting soil can last six months before their quality diminishes. Consider replacing soil in your gardening containers every year or two because:

- Peat moss can compact
- There can be a reduction in aeration and water retention
- The container's nutrients diminish from plant consumption and drainage

Happy gardening, planting, and growing!