

Gardening Basics

My Child's First - Spring Container Vegetables Cherry Tomatoes & Basil

- Have your child follow along with you as you start your container garden.
- For more in-depth information, go to the websites listed at the end of this article or talk to your local nursery about other vegetable/herb options.

When to start your container garden: A general guideline is the end of March to the beginning of April for warm-weather plants.

Days to harvest: Tomato plants can be harvested in 55 to 70 days. A basil plant can be harvested when the plant has 3 to 5 sets (pair) of leaves. If you grow basil from seed, you can harvest in 88 days.

Step 1: Purchase from your local garden nursery

- The Gardening Staples
 - Gloves
 - Hand Shovel
 - Watering Can
 - Container (at least a 14" pot – will produce more in a larger pot. Make sure the container has a drain hole)
 - Saucer for the Container
 - Tomato cage for support
- The Living 'Stuff'
 - 5 lb. bag of potting soil
 - Fertilizer- 10-10-10 or 5-5-5 (equal amounts of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous)
 - Plants-
 - Cherry Tomatoes (1 plant) Ex: Sweet 100 or Sun cherry
 - Basil (1 plant) Ex: sweet basil

Tip: Remember to always read your plant labels!

Step 2: Plant

- Put the saucer under your container
- Fill your container $\frac{3}{4}$ full of potting soil
- Mix in fertilizer (follow instructions on the bag)
- Add water – make sure soil is moist
- Place the tomato plant in the soil up to the first set of leaves (if you need, the stem can be planted horizontally)
- Place the basil plant in the soil deep enough to cover the roots
- Water the plants in the container



Cherry Tomato, Mark, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0, via flickr



Sweet Basil, junksignal, CC BY-SA 2.0, via flickr

Step 3: Maintain

- Place container in a sunny spot
- Water as needed (stick your finger in the container to see if it's moist)
- Add fertilizer (check recommendations on the bag)
- Check for bugs and remove any bugs on the plants
- Towards the end of the season, when your basil starts flowering, pinch off the flowers to encourage continued leaf growth
- Harvest when?
 - Tomatoes are red (if they are not quite red, they will ripen after two weeks if kept between 65 to 70 degrees)
 - Basil plant has doubled in size (you can pick up to ½ the leaves on the plant)

Websites for more information

Recommended varieties, fact sheets & problem solving: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/>

Container Grown Tomatoes: <https://extension.psu.edu/container-grown-tomatoes>