



GN3

GARDENING IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Tiny Gardens

Time: 70 Minutes

Whether you have a front porch, back patio, balcony or sunroom, container gardens are the perfect place to grow healthy vegetables. They're easy to maintain and can grow in everything from a recycled plastic tub to a wood or ceramic container. Step by step, we'll show you how to get started.

OBJECTIVES:

Describe vegetables suitable for container gardening.

Identify supplies needed for container gardening.

Explain how SNAP benefits can be used to purchase seeds and seedlings.

Demonstrate how to create a container garden.

SETUP

- Review resource list and print it out. Purchase all necessary supplies after reviewing the [HFL Cost Calculator](#).
- Set up demo station with the necessary items for planting a container garden.

INTRO (10 Minutes)

- Welcome participants and introduce yourself.
- Take care of any housekeeping items (closest bathroom, water fountain, etc.).
- Give a brief description of the educational experience.
- Engage in an icebreaker to gauge topic knowledge from the bank of options provided in the [Welcome Toolkit](#).

DEMO (10 Minutes)

- Demonstrate how to create a container garden (see demo script). Play video as indicated.

ACTIVITY (20 Minutes)

- Participants will prepare a recipe using fresh cherry tomatoes (Baby Spinach and Tomato Salad with Warm Olive Vinaigrette).

RECAP (10 Minutes)

- Pass out the handout(s) and go through them together.

GOAL SETTING/CLOSING (20 Minutes)

- Engage in a goal setting activity from the bank of options provided in the [Welcome Toolkit](#). Pass out the Setting SMART Goals handout to participants.
- Thank participants and encourage them to join the next activity. (Provide date/time/location if known.)



NOTES: Read legal liability disclaimer before activity: [Food Liability Disclaimer](#). Refer to Resource List for all necessary supplies and handouts. This Healthy for Life® Educational Experience was created by Aramark and the American Heart Association as part of our Healthy for Life® Initiative. We are proud to be working together to help improve the health of all Americans.

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Tiny Gardens Resource List

HANDOUTS/VIDEOS

Find these resources on AHA's YouTube channel or heart.org/healthyforgood

- Video – [How to Create a Container Garden](#)
- Article – [Keep Fruits and Vegetables Fresher Longer](#)

Find these resources in this lesson

- Recipe – [Baby Spinach and Tomato Salad with Warm Olive Vinaigrette](#)
- Handout – [Keep it Fresh Infographic](#)
- Handout – [Seasons of Eating Infographic](#)
- Handout – [How to Grow a Vegetable Container Garden](#)
- Handout – [Setting SMART Goals](#)

SPACE SETUP

- Chairs and tables for participants
- Demo table
- Pens for participants
- Folders
- Computer, internet access and projector, if available

DEMO SUPPLIES

- 18-inch deep container with drainage hole to plant cherry tomatoes and lettuce
- Cherry tomato and lettuce plants (seedlings). Seed packets to show that you can grow vegetables from scratch. But for the demo it's best to use seedlings.
- Potting soil – preferably with fertilizer
- Small hand trowel
- Plant fertilizer (only if potting soil doesn't contain fertilizer)
- Watering can
- 24-inch garden stake

ACTIVITY INGREDIENTS* AND SUPPLIES**

- 2 cups baby spinach
- 2 cups torn Romaine lettuce
- 6 mini yellow tomatoes (or 1 large yellow tomato)
- 6 red cherry tomatoes (or 1 large red tomato)
- 1 ½ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium garlic cloves
- ⅓ cup canned natural green ripe olives
- 1 ½ tablespoons Balsamic vinegar
- ½ cup fresh basil
- Freshly ground pepper
- Electric burner(s)
- Large mixing bowl
- Salad plates (for tasting)
- Forks (for tasting)
- Chef's knife
- Tongs
- Small saucepan
- Wooden spoon
- Measuring cups/spoons
- Spoon
- Pepper grinder

*Recipe serves 4 people; please multiply ingredients as necessary for your participants.
**Purchase appropriate number of supplies for your participants. Participants can divide into teams and share supplies and ingredients.

Tiny Gardens Demo Script



SAY:

A variety of herbs and vegetables grow well in container gardens. Some include basil, parsley, cilantro, cherry tomatoes, peas, radishes, bush varieties of summer or zucchini squash and cucumbers, peppers and leafy greens such as spinach and leaf lettuce. If you grow carrots, be sure to use a container that's at least double the length they'll grow.



Large vegetables such as melons, corn, pumpkins or squash don't work well in container gardens. They need more space to grow.

Hold up a tomato plant and a seed packet.



SAY:

You can start your veggies from seeds or seedlings. Starting with seeds is less expensive than buying seedlings, but harder to maintain. You have to ensure the seeds don't dry out or aren't over-watered. In either case, they will die.



Seeds and plants that produce food or are used to produce cooking spices are eligible for purchase under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This SNAP benefit can include products such as cucumber seeds and tomato plants.



For more information on SNAP benefits, visit the USDA website at fns.usda.gov/snap/eligible-food-items

Hold up the container you have chosen for your container garden.



SAY:

Today we are going to create a container garden which will produce cherry tomatoes and lettuce. Here's the container I have chosen. But you can use just about anything that is large enough and made of a food-safe material.



Recycled items, including an inexpensive five-gallon bucket from the hardware store, are good choices. You can also look for attractive ceramic, wood and plastic containers. It's best to avoid terracotta containers because the clay sucks the water out of the soil.



Drainage is key, so a hole at the bottom of the container is critical. It allows water to drain freely so there's adequate air for the roots.



You need one large hole or several smaller ones at the base of your container. You can usually drill holes if drainage is insufficient. Some resin or plastic pots have pre-punched holes at the bottom for easy removal.



To keep soil from falling through large drainage holes, place a coffee filter over the hole.



Bigger is better when it comes to containers. Containers that are smaller than 12 to 18 inches generally won't work.

Hold up the bag of potting soil.



SAY:

Choose a quality potting soil when growing vegetables. Soils for containers need to provide adequate space and be well drained while still being able to retain enough moisture for the plants to grow. Do not use soil from your garden because it may not drain properly.



If available, organic soil has a higher variety of nutrients and helps plants thrive.

Start scooping the soil into the container.



SAY:

When filling containers with potting soil, don't fill to the top of the pot. Leave about an inch of space between the top of the soil and rim of the pot. This will make watering easier and keep water from running over the edge.

Place the plants in the soil.



SAY:

Plant the seedlings just as you would in a garden by spreading the roots, then covering the roots with potting mix and firming the soil around the roots. Today we're planting cherry tomatoes and lettuce in one pot so we can create a salad after our harvest. Put a stake in the soil for tomato vines to climb.

Check if the soil needs watering, pick up the watering can and water the plants.



SAY:

Vegetable plants need lots of water, especially during the height of summer. You'll probably need to water daily and maybe even twice daily in the summer. It's important to keep the soil moist but not overwater it. How can you tell if the plant needs water? Stick your finger about an inch into the soil. If the soil feels dry, add water.



Now that we've created our container garden, here are a few tips to help your vegetables grow.

- If your potting soil doesn't already have fertilizer, add organic fertilizers throughout the growing season.
- Most vegetables need direct sunlight, but if you live in a hot climate, you may need to shade your plants midday.
- If you live in a cool climate, make sure the soil is at least 60 degrees before putting your container garden outside. You can use a meat thermometer to check soil temperature.



Have patience and enjoy your healthy bounty.

Tiny Gardens Activity Script

Divide up participants into groups of four to work on making the Baby Spinach and Tomato Salad with Warm Olive Vinaigrette. It serves four.

Invite group members to pick up their resources (recipes, ingredients and cooking supplies) at the demo station.



SAY:






Now we're going to fast-forward and imagine that your container garden has flourished and produced red and yellow cherry tomatoes which will provide sweetness to this recipe for a Baby Spinach and Tomato Salad with Warm Olive Vinaigrette.

Demo the next section while you are providing instructions.



SAY:

Among the four of you, split up these tasks for creating your salad which you'll all get to sample at the end.


-  Measure two cups of baby spinach and put it in the large bowl.
-  Tear the romaine lettuce and add two cups to the spinach.
-  Now that the two leafy greens are mixed, transfer them to salad plates.
-  Take the six yellow tomatoes and six cherry tomatoes and cut them in half.
-  Arrange the colorful tomatoes on the greens.

Determine how many salad dressing servings you need to make based on the group's size and measure ingredients for the dressing.



SAY:

Now you will cook the Olive Vinaigrette over the electric burner on your table.

-  **(Or, if you only have one electric burner to demo, say this):** Since the Olive Vinaigrette requires cooking, I'll make enough dressing for the entire group and then invite you to bring your plates to the demo table. I'll spoon it on your salads.









If you like, you can gather round the burner while I prepare the dressing.

Demo the prep work.



SAY:

But first, there's some prep work you'll need to do for the dressing. Please divide these steps among yourselves.

-  For four servings, mince two medium garlic cloves.
-  Now rinse and drain $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of natural green ripe olives. Thickly slice them.
-  Finally, thinly slice $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fresh basil
-  Now that the prep work is done, we're ready to start cooking. For four salad servings, add $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil to a saucepan.
-  Heat the oil over medium-low heat. Swirl the oil to coat the bottom of the pan.
-  Add the minced garlic cloves and cook for one minute. Stir constantly.
-  Now add the olives and stir frequently. Cook the olives for one to two minutes or until warmed.
-  Remove the saucepan from the heat.
-  Stir in the $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons of balsamic vinegar for four servings.
-  Your dressing is complete. Spoon the vinaigrette over each of the plated salads.
-  **(Or, if you've demonstrated cooking over an electric burner from the demo table, say this):** Bring your plates to me and I'll spoon the dressing on each of your salads.
-  To top it all off, sprinkle your salads with thinly sliced fresh basil and freshly ground pepper.
-  Enjoy and be sure to take home the full recipe.

Baby Spinach and Tomato Salad with Warm Olive Vinaigrette

Makes 4 servings; 1½ cups per serving
Per serving: 91 Calories; 1.0 g Saturated Fat; 120 mg Sodium



Year-round, cherry tomatoes provide sweetness for this simple American Heart Association salad recipe. When tomatoes are in season, use any two red and yellow varieties.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups baby spinach
- 2 cups torn romaine lettuce
- 6 mini yellow tomatoes, halved, or 1 large yellow tomato, cut into 8 wedges
- 6 cherry tomatoes, halved, or 1 large red tomato, cut into 8 wedges
- 1½ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium garlic cloves, minced
- ⅓ cup thickly sliced, canned natural green ripe olives, rinsed and drained
- 1½ tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- ½ cup thinly sliced fresh basil
- Freshly ground pepper

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large bowl, toss together the spinach and romaine. Transfer the greens to salad plates. Arrange the tomatoes on the greens.
2. In a small saucepan, heat the oil over medium-low heat, swirling to coat the bottom. Cook the garlic for 1 minute, or until fragrant, stirring constantly. Stir in the olives. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes, or just until warmed, stirring frequently. Remove from the heat.
3. Stir in the vinegar. Spoon the dressing over the salads. Sprinkle with the basil and pepper.

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KEEP IT/FRESH

Stretch your produce and dollars by knowing how to store fresh fruits and vegetables.



1/PANTRY

Pack away in a cool, dark place like your pantry or cellar:

ONIONS, GARLIC & SHALLOTS

SWEET POTATOES, POTATOES, & YAMS

HARD SQUASH

(Winter, Acorn, Spaghetti, Butternut)

WATERMELON

The American Heart Association recommends 4 servings of fruit and 5 servings of vegetables per day.

2/COUNTERTOP

Store loose and away from sunlight, heat and moisture:

BANANAS

CITRUS FRUIT

Store lemons, limes, oranges and grapefruit loose or in a mesh bag. Refrigerate for longer storage.

STONE FRUIT

Ripen avocados, apricots, nectarines, peaches and plums in a paper bag, then move to the fridge where they'll last a few more days.

TOMATOES

3/REFRIGERATOR

Store in plastic bags with holes in your produce drawer, unless noted:

APPLES & PEARS

BEETS & TURNIPS

Remove greens and keep loose in the crisper drawer.

BERRIES, CHERRIES & GRAPES

Keep dry in covered containers or plastic bags.

BROCCOLI & CAULIFLOWER

CARROTS & PARSNIPS

Remove greens.

CELERY

CORN

Store inside their husks.

CUCUMBERS, EGGPLANT & PEPPERS

Store on the upper shelf, which is the warmer part of the fridge.

FRESH HERBS

Except basil. Keep stems moist and wrap loosely in plastic.

GREEN BEANS

LETTUCE & LEAFY GREENS

Wash, spin or pat dry, wrap loosely in a dish towel or paper towels and place in a plastic bag in vegetable drawer. Keep stems moist.

MELONS

MUSHROOMS

Keep dry and unwashed in store container or paper bag.

PEAS

ZUCCHINI & SUMMER/YELLOW SQUASH

KEEP THEM APART:

- Fruits like apples, bananas and pears give off ethylene gas, which can make other produce ripen and rot faster.
- Store vegetables and fruits separately.
- Keep apples, bananas, broccoli, cauliflower, cucumbers, onions, pears, potatoes and watermelon away from other produce.

SEASONS **OF EATING**

Your heart-healthy recipes will taste even better with seasonal produce.

SPRING SUMMER FALL WINTER

artichokes, asparagus, carrots, chives, fava beans, green onions, leeks, lettuce, parsnips, peas, radishes, rhubarb and Swiss chard



berries, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, figs, garlic, grapes, green beans, melons, peppers (sweet and hot), stone fruit (apricots, cherries, nectarines, peaches, plums), summer squash, tomatoes and zucchini



apples, brussels sprouts, dates, hard squash (acorn, butternut, spaghetti), pears, pumpkins and sweet potatoes



bok choy, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, citrus fruit (clementines, grapefruit, lemons, limes, oranges, tangerines), collard greens, endive, leafy greens (collards, kale, mustard greens, spinach) and root vegetables (beets, turnips)



KEEP THESE TIPS IN MIND WHEN USING AND SHOPPING FOR SEASONAL PRODUCE:

- 1** Fresh foods are often less expensive during their harvest season. You may even save money by buying in bulk.
- 2** Shop the farmers' market to learn more about produce and get ideas on how to prepare foods in season.
- 3** Gardening gives you fresh seasonal produce and a little exercise, too. The sense of accomplishment you'll feel will make that produce taste even better!
- 4** Frozen, canned and dried fruits and vegetables also can be healthy choices. Compare food labels and choose items with the lowest amounts of sodium and added sugars.
- 5** Choose canned fruit packed in water, its own juice or light syrup (avoid heavy syrup).
- 6** Choose canned and frozen vegetables without sauces that can be high in sodium and saturated fat.
- 7** Freeze fresh produce at the peak of its season, so you can add it to smoothies, soups and breads and enjoy it throughout the year.

How to Grow a Vegetable Container Garden



- **STEP 1:** Select vegetables for container garden.



- **STEP 2:** Find a suitable container larger than 18 inches.



- **STEP 3:** Ensure proper drainage. Few plants can tolerate sitting in water. Healthy roots mean healthier plants, so be sure there are holes for drainage. Drill a large hole or several smaller holes in bottom of the container.



- **STEP 4:** Choose a quality potting soil. Soils for containers need to provide adequate space and drain well while still being able to retain enough moisture for plant growth. Consider organic soil which is higher in nutrients and creates better-tasting produce.



- **STEP 5:** Choose vegetables for container gardening. Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, squash and eggplant require full sun. Leafy vegetables such as lettuce, cabbage, collards, mustard greens, spinach and parsley can tolerate a shadier location, compared to root vegetables such as turnips, beets, radishes, carrots and onions.

- **STEP 6:** Time to plant. Plant the seedlings just as you would in a garden by spreading the roots, then covering the roots with potting soil and firming it around the roots. Put stakes in the soil for tomato and other vegetable vines to climb.

Don't fill to the top of the container. Leave about an inch of space between the top of the soil and rim of the pot. This will help make watering easier and keep water from running over the edge.



- **STEP 7:** Water your container garden. Vegetable plants need lots of water, especially during the height of summer. It's important to keep the soil moist but not overwater it. How can you tell if the plant needs water? Stick your finger about an inch into the soil. If the soil feels dry, add water.



- **STEP 8:** If you didn't use potting soil with fertilizer, you will need to fertilize your container garden throughout the growing season. There are several products on the market, including a slow-release or timed-release fertilizer. When they come in contact with water, small amounts of nutrients are released to the soil. Liquid fertilizers are mixed with water according to label instructions and then applied during normal watering.



- **STEP 9:** Pay attention to your climate. Most vegetables need direct sunlight, but if you live in a hot climate, you may need to shade your plants midday. If you live in a cool climate, make sure the soil is at least 60 degrees before putting your container garden outside. You can use a meat thermometer to check soil temperature.

- **STEP 10:** Have patience and enjoy your healthy bounty.

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SPECIFIC

- What exactly do you want to accomplish?

MEASURABLE

- How will you track your progress towards your goal?

ACHIEVABLE

- Is reaching your goal possible with your full effort?

REALISTIC

- Do you have the resources and ability to achieve your goal?
If not, how can you get them?

TIME-BOUND

- When will your goal be achieved?

EXAMPLE OF A SMART GOAL:

I will increase the number of fruit servings I eat daily by 2 cups within the next 3 months.

Personal SMART goal:
