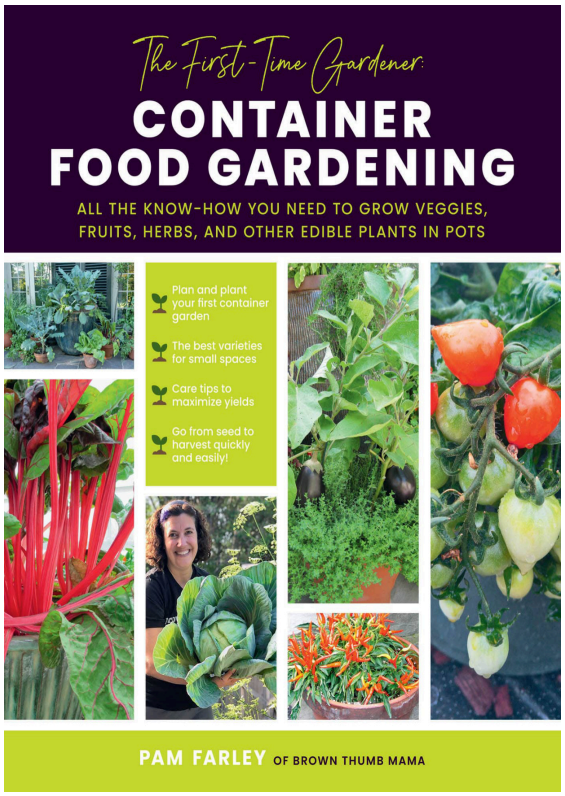


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Vegetables, interplanted with herbs and flowers, are a beautiful and practical addition to your container garden.

Introduction

Welcome to *The First-Time Gardener: Container Food Gardening*! This is a beginner's introduction to growing vegetables, herbs, and fruit in containers. Whether you're thinking about growing some parsley on your windowsill or setting up an extensive container garden on your apartment balcony or in your backyard, you're in the right place.

Growing food in pots or containers is the easiest way to grow a garden. You don't need a lot of space or a lot of money, and you'll get to enjoy a variety of delicious, fresh foods. You might even find your kids eating snap peas right off the vine, like mine do!

My name is Pam Farley, and I've been container gardening in my city backyard for more than 25 years. Some years, we grow more food than we can eat—and some years, things don't turn out so well. But each year I keep trying, and I'm always learning new things. I share my successes and failures in the garden on my website, BrownThumbMama.com.

After all these years in the garden, I've learned a lot about what works—and even more about what doesn't work. Some of the gardening advice you'll hear out there is inaccurate at best and harmful at worst. This book will bust some of those myths and help you get your container garden started right. You'll benefit from my years of experience, and you'll grow your gardening confidence along with your vegetables.



Vegetables can be pruned and trained to grow in the smallest spaces, like this balcony garden with a potted cucumber growing on a trellis.



Welcome to the world of gardening! I'm so glad you're here.

The First-Time Gardener: Container Food Gardening starts at the very beginning and answers the questions that other gardening books assume you know. Things like

- What does "full sun" mean?
- Is there a "right side up" when you plant seeds?
- Should I start my garden with seeds or plants from the nursery?
- Do I really need all those fancy tools and gizmos to start a garden?

I promise you'll find the answers to these questions and many, many more throughout these pages. You can read this book straight through from beginning to end or use the table of contents or index to skip from one section to another as needed throughout the growing season.

Once you've started your garden, I'd love to see what you've grown! Share with me (@BrownThumbMama) on

Facebook or Instagram and use the tag #ContainerFoodGardening.

Happy gardening!

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Why Grow Your Own Food?

When I got my own place after college, I told my friends I was starting a vegetable garden. Some of them scoffed. “You have a nice office job and are planning your wedding. You have too much going on! Why would you spend all that time and trouble planting a garden when you can just buy what you want at the store?”

As you may suspect, I planted that garden anyway. Even though I had a busy schedule, it only took a few minutes each day to tend to the garden. It was a little nature break in my own backyard, and I would munch on snow peas and strawberries while petting the neighbor’s cat. Gardening is relaxing and productive, all at the same time. There’s nothing better than enjoying your harvest—whether your plant produces only a single tomato or you end up with more green beans than your family can eat in a month.

Regardless of whether you decide to grow a few herbs on your windowsill or to plant every single one of your favorite vegetables, you’ll soon find that growing your own food is one of the most amazing and satisfying pastimes out there. Here are some reasons why:

FRESH IS BEST

Did you know that some of the vegetables at the grocery store are picked weeks before you buy them? Many fruits and vegetables are grown in other countries and shipped to warehouses before being trucked to the store. Some fruits, like apples, are held in cold storage for months until they’re sent to the produce department. This means you aren’t enjoying them at their best flavor or freshness. Compare that to being able to walk out to your patio, pick an apple off your tree, and eat it on the spot. Yes, you can grow fruit trees in containers! Check out Chapter 2 for details.

AMAZING VARIETY

How many types of carrots can you find at your grocery store or farmer’s market—maybe two or three? Believe it or not, there are more than 40 different varieties of carrots that you can grow and enjoy. And there are thousands of types of tomatoes, in nearly every color and size you can imagine. There are even striped and spotted tomatoes! Growing a garden is the best way to try unique and delicious vegetables. You might find yourself at the store, looking at the price of an unusual herb or vegetable, and deciding to grow it for yourself for much less.



You can grow container vegetables in the front yard, and no one will be any the wiser. This potted artichoke plant is surrounded by colorful violas with parsley growing below.

FAMILY FUN

Kids who grow vegetables and fruits love to eat them. There's nothing better than sharing a few hours in the garden with the kids in your life—even the youngest toddlers can drop a seed into a pot and sprinkle it with water. The kids will enjoy a reason to play in the dirt, and along with their vegetables they'll grow a lifelong love of gardening. You'll save a ton of money (especially if your kids eat as much fruit as mine do). And they'll be the talk of the lunchroom when they show up with homegrown purple snow peas, white alpine strawberries, or yellow carrots.

SAFETY & HEALTH

Every so often, you'll hear a news story about a vegetable recall due to contamination of some sort. People and stores end up throwing away huge amounts of spinach, sprouts, lettuce, or other vegetables because of safety concerns. If you're growing your own vegetables and fruits, the chances of contamination are nearly zero. You can decide if you want to grow using organic principles, conventional fertilizers, or a combination of both.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Almost everything in the grocery store comes from farms and warehouses that are hundreds or even thousands of miles away. When you grow your own herbs, vegetables, and fruits, you're helping in a small way to reduce shipping pollution. No plastic packaging is required for homegrown food, which also reduces waste—plus, when you share your harvest with your friends and neighbors, you're building community and saving them from a trip to the store. Your outdoor container garden also provides a habitat for birds, bees, butterflies, and other bugs. If you choose to plant in recycled or upcycled containers, you're keeping those items out of the waste stream, as well.

What the heck does that word mean?

Don't fret! All of us were new gardeners at some point, and no question is silly or dumb. If you run across a gardening word you don't recognize, check the Glossary for a clear and simple definition. And if you have a question that this book doesn't answer, send it to me at BrownThumbMama.com/contact and I'll answer the most popular questions in future articles!



Golden sage has striking, variegated leaves that are edible and ornamental.