



# Plant Care Guide

FOOD WELL ALLIANCE



# STARTING YOUR CONTAINER GARDEN

## *Instructions for Transplanting Your Seedlings*

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Bucket (with holes drilled in bottom) or other semi-permeable container at least 5 gallons
- Soil/compost mix
- Seedlings
- Trowel
- Gloves

### CARE

- Say something nice to your plant! (optional, but fun).
- Place container in a sunny location (depending on plant needs) and water/check on your plant regularly. See the plant-specific guides for more details on how to treat your seedlings well!

### INSTRUCTIONS

- On a surface that won't be hard to clean (i.e. not your carpet), pour/shovel soil into buckets until they are filled within an inch of the top. Push soil down gently and fill again to the same height. Soil will settle over time, and you want your plants to be close to the surface of your bucket.
- In the center of your bucket, dig out a small hole about 2x the size of the soil around your new seedling. Move the soil to the sides of the bucket, rather than taking it out.
- When soil is loose, remove your plant from its plastic container. Gently press the sides of your seedling's container to loosen it and then slide out the seedling (don't pull it out or you risk breaking the stem off from the roots).
- Place seedling roots into your hole and gently scrape soil back around it. You want all the roots to be completely covered by soil, and the stem/leaves to be exposed. No need to pat down the soil after planting - loose soil allows water to enter more easily. Make sure your plant isn't sitting in a low-point, you want the soil to be relatively flat.
- Then water your plant! Taking your water container pour about 24 oz. of water evenly around the entire base of the plant, allowing the soil to settle in and make contact



# PREPPING CONTAINERS FOR FALL PLANTING

## PLANTS

When your plants (except for herbs) stop producing for the year, you can remove them from your pot, shake off any excess soil from the roots and add them to your compost or brush pile.

- If plants suffered from disease, they should not be composted.

## REPLANTING

Go see what new plant starts are available at local farms! Common fall crops include: kale, lettuce, carrots, collards, etc. In Georgia, you can wait to plant most fall crops until your summer crops stop producing. September–October should work well, but wait until hot temperatures start to wind down, otherwise you'll really need to pamper your plants for them to do well.

## SOIL

- Because plants get their nutrients from the soil, you'll need to refresh your bucket garden before planting it again.
- Loosen up any soil that is left in the container - you can do this with a hand trowel.
- Add nutrients - if possible, add an OMRI certified plant food (a very small quantity will suffice for a bucket garden).
- Add more soil, if needed - you don't want to add soil from the ground because it's too dense to properly drain in your bucket. A soil/compost mix or raised bed mix (sold in bags at stores) will provide nutrients and volume with minimal effort. You'll want to fill your bucket almost to the top, mixing new soil in with the remains of the previous growing season.



# EGGPLANT

## BASIC CARE

### SUN

Full exposure for at least 6-8 hours a day

### WATER

- Water regularly, especially when young, to maintain consistent soil moisture.
- To water: pour or spray gently around the base of the eggplant, not on the leaves.
- If you have access to mulch, a layer on top can help keep moisture in the soil.
- Do not overwater - if the plant sits in water, it can cause disease.

### HARVESTING

- Each eggplant variety will have a different size/age of maturity. Don't let the eggplant stay on the plant after it reaches maturity or it will start to get tough.
  - > Smaller eggplants will be more tender and sweet, and can be harvested before they're fully mature.
- To harvest: Use clippers or scissors to remove the eggplant between the fruit and the branch it's growing off of. Pulling the eggplant risks damaging the plant.

### STORING

- Eggplants won't store very long, so eat them when you harvest them!
- If you need to store, keep in the refrigerator for up to one week.

## COMMON PROBLEMS

### PLANTS NOT WATERED ENOUGH

Plants may have trouble establishing roots if they don't receive enough water when they're young. Water evenly and often to keep the soil soft for root growth.

### EGGPLANT ROTTING ON THE PLANT

For eggplant fruit rotting on the plant before it's fully mature - remove any diseased fruits/plants, and harvest eggplants when younger to avoid rot.

## BASIC CARE

If planting from seed, soak seeds for several hours to increase germination.

### SUN

Full exposure for at least 8 hours a day

### WATER

- Okra is very sun and heat tolerant, but should be watered regularly for continued production of pods, especially when young.
- Once they're a little more settled and mature, okra plants can go up to a week without water.

### HARVESTING

- Okra should be ready to begin harvesting after 60-70 days.
- Wear gloves/long sleeves if possible, as most okra have tiny spines that irritate skin.
- Do not pull okra off, use scissors to cut just above the top of the pod.
- Harvest the pods when they are 2-3 inches long and not yet hard.
  - > If you allow pods to stay on the plant too long, they can be dried and saved for seeds.
  - > It is better to harvest small than too large, as pods get woody.

### STORING

- Eat immediately! Young okra pods are delicious raw, but all okra pods should be cooked soon after harvesting to keep them from getting slimy.
- If you have too much okra to eat immediately, they can be stored in a bag in the freezer until you're ready to use them.

## COMMON PROBLEMS

### GROWING OKRA FOR MULTIPLE YEARS

If you grow okra for multiple years, grow it in a different container or row the following year for soil health.

### PLANT STOPS PRODUCING (HOT WEATHER)

Outside temperatures above 95F can kill off pollen, which means that okra pods won't form on the plant. If your plant isn't producing pods or the flowers keep dying off during a heat spell, control other stress factors by giving plants regular, even water. The plant should start producing again once it gets a little cooler.

### PLANT STOPS PRODUCING (COLD WEATHER)

Okra do not like cold weather. Okra seeds won't germinate in soil less than 65F and established okra plants don't like it when it gets cold outside. Once they stop producing in the fall, save and dry pods for seeds and pull out the okra plant.

## BASIC CARE

### SUN

At least 6-8 hours a day

### WATER

- Pour water directly into the soil at the base of the plant, not on the leaves or fruits
- Keep soil consistently moist but not overly wet
- In Summer: plants will need almost daily watering

### STAKING/CAGING

As your pepper plant grows, loosely secure it to a stake or stick to help the plant grow vertically and support the weight of its fruit. This can also be done with a tomato cage.

### HARVESTING

- Peppers are ready to harvest when they reach full size (about 3-4 inches), have a firm skin and are bright yellow in color
- Banana Peppers will continue to turn red as they ripen, and can still be eaten
- To keep from pulling entire bunches off your plant, use scissors or a kitchen knife to cut peppers off the plant as you need them
- If you continue to care for your plant, you should be able to harvest peppers for most of the summer and into early Fall

### STORING

- Rinse in cool water, allow to dry thoroughly and store in the fridge
- Peppers that are still a bit green (instead of full yellow) can be left on a counter/table to continue ripening
- Avoid moisture when storing, it will make peppers rot more quickly

## COMMON PROBLEMS

### LEAVES CURLING/WILTING & DISCOLORING

- This may be caused by high heat or conditions, if the plant is on asphalt/concrete, try moving it somewhere that carries less heat.
- Water evenly and regularly, pouring water around the base of the plant when the top inch of soil is dry (might need to be done every day in the summer).

### INSECT PESTS

Peppers generally don't have a lot of insect pests, most can be treated with insecticidal soap or by removing the insects by hand if they are larger.

### MY PEPPER MADE ME CRY

- Hot peppers generally have capsaicin, a compound that helps keep pests away but also can make your eyes water and your throat burn.
- To avoid unnecessary tears, consider wearing gloves when harvesting peppers, don't touch your face and wash hands immediately after handling or slicing peppers.

### WINTER IS COMING

Peppers do not handle frost well. In the fall, if weather reports predict below-freezing temperatures, you should bring your plant indoors for the night or remove all the peppers before the freeze.



# TOMATOES

## BASIC CARE

### SUN

At least 6-8 hours a day

### WATER

- Pour water directly into the soil at the base of the plant, not on the leaves or fruits.
- Keep soil consistently moist but not overly wet.
  - > To test: push finger one inch deep into soil, if dry, add water.
- In summer, plants will need almost daily watering.

### STAKING/CAGING

As your tomato plant grows, loosely secure it to a stake or stick to help the plant grow vertically and support the weight of its fruit. This can also be done with a tomato cage.

### HARVESTING

- To safely remove a tomato from the vine, hold the plant just above the fruit and use your other hand to gently pull the tomato. You can twist the stem a little to encourage it to break, if needed.
- Many gardeners prefer to harvest when the tomato is mostly red, but you may need to harvest earlier if pests are a problem.
- Tomatoes can ripen off the vine, so you can harvest them when they are a size you like and allow them to ripen indoors.
- Wash tomatoes thoroughly with water before eating.

### STORING

- Tomatoes that need to ripen can be stored on the counter.
- Tomatoes that are perfectly ripe should be eaten immediately!
- If they can't be eaten immediately, store them in the fridge to prevent continued ripening (and rotting!)

## COMMON PROBLEMS

### INSECT PESTS

- Insects: remove by hand, or try insecticidal soap (check out the UGA Extension website for more details).
- Squirrels: Consider getting a net/covering for the tomatoes to keep them away.
- Rots: tomatoes are affected by several pathogens in the soil. To prevent the spread of these pathogens, don't plant tomatoes in the same container twice without changing out the soil.

### TOMATO IS NO LONGER PRODUCING

Tomatoes are annuals that will not produce again once they stop. Remove the tomato plant from the bucket. The soil should be good for planting again the following year, but it would be best to plant something different (preferably not in the tomato family).



# CUCUMBERS

## BASIC CARE

### SUN

- Full exposure 6-8 hours a day
- Some afternoon shading in hot summer months can reduce plant stress.

### WATER

- Pour water directly into the soil at the base of the plant, not on the leaves or fruits.
- Keep soil consistently moist but not overly wet.
  - > To test: push finger one inch deep into soil, if dry, add water.
- In summer, plants will need almost daily watering.

### TRELLIS: YOUR CUCUMBERS NEED SUPPORT!

In order to grow vining cucumbers, you'll need a way for them to climb. Trellises can be constructed from garden stakes and chicken wire, or you can get creative with other materials.

### HARVESTING

- Generally ready to harvest 50-70 days from planting
- Cucumbers are ready to harvest when they are green, firm, and a size that fits the variety and your use for them. Don't let them get too large or allow them to get yellow on the vine.
- To harvest: using scissors or shears, cut the vine just above fruit. Don't pull - it can damage the plant.

### STORING

Cucumbers are mostly water, so they will spoil quickly if not stored well. Eat or refrigerate after harvesting. Offer to your neighbors if you have too many to consume before they start to go bad!

## COMMON PROBLEMS

### FLOWERING BUT NOT FRUITING

Pollination isn't successful. Cucumbers have male and female flowers and sometimes when the plant is young, they don't sync up in their flowering. As the plant matures, you should get more successful pollination.

### INSECT PESTS: SQUASH BUGS & PICKLE WORMS

- You'll see signs of nibbling on your leaves and mining of your cucumbers. To help prevent, plant cucumbers away from squash and melons.
- Harvest cucumbers young if pickle worms are eating your crop (otherwise they are likely to get mined).



# SWEET POTATOES

## BASIC CARE

### SUN

- Sweet potatoes are a tropical plant and need a long growing season with lots of sun
- Full exposure 6-8 hours a day

### WATER

- Immediately after planting the slips, sweet potatoes will need frequent, even watering.
- Watering should remain regular throughout the growing season, moist soil will help with even potato growth (rather than fighting their way through hard soil).

### HARVESTING

- Sweet potatoes should be ready to harvest in 90-120 days.
- The vines will begin to die back as they approach harvest.
- Harvest before first frost to avoid losing the crop.
- When harvesting, cut back to the vines so you can more easily remove sweet potatoes, just leave a little bit of vine poking out of the top so you remember where the potatoes are (esp. in a row, not so much a bucket, hard to lose them there).
- Loosen the soil around the sweet potatoes with a trowel or potato fork (depending on what they're planted in) making sure not to pierce the potatoes. Pull them out, shake off soil, and allow to dry before curing.

### STORING

- Sweet potatoes need to cure in a warmer (80\*) area for a week or two to gain their full sweetness.
- After curing, they should be stored in a cool, dark environment (like a pantry) until ready to use. Without exposure to moisture, they can last for many months and are delicious year round.

### WEEDING

Because sweet potatoes grow underground (where weed roots also like to grow), they'll need frequent weeding. Removing competition helps the plants produce better, healthier crops.

## COMMON PROBLEMS

### WEEDS

It's hard to weed around sweet potatoes because they spread out so much over the surface and have delicate roots that you don't want to disturb. You mostly need to hand-weed (as opposed to using hoes) to avoid damage to the sweet potato plant, which can be very time consuming. Mulching around the plants can cut down on weed growth.

### INSECT PESTS

To avoid nematodes and other soil-dwelling pests, rotate where you grow your sweet potatoes from year to year. There's not much that can be done if they wreck havoc on your crop on a particular year, except turn over the soil well, plant garlic there the following year and plant your sweet potatoes somewhere else.



# SUMMER SQUASH

Zucchini, Yellow Straight Neck, or Crooked Neck

## BASIC CARE

### SUN

Full exposure 6-8 hours a day

### WATER

- Pour water directly into the soil at the base of the plant, not on the leaves or fruits.
- Keep soil consistently moist but not overly wet.
  - > To test: push finger one inch deep into soil, if dry, add water.
- In summer, plants will need almost daily watering.

### HARVESTING

- Summer squash normally mature in 35-45 days.
- Harvest squash when they are young for best flavor - look for squash that are about 4-6 inches long and about 1.5 inches thick, depending on variety.
- To harvest, use scissors or shears to cut the stem just above the fruit. Avoid temptation to break off the fruit, it doesn't always separate cleanly.
- Remove fruits as soon as they are ripe to avoid having them take moisture and nutrients from the plant.

### STORING

Squash can be stored in a cool location for 2-3 days, but is best eaten soon after harvesting.

## COMMON PROBLEMS

### SQUASH FLOWERING BUT NOT FRUITING

You may have to hand-pollinate them! Check out this informative [video/guide](#). You can be a matchmaker for squash!

### SQUASH BUGS

They'll suck your leaves dry and can be removed by hand, but are more easily controlled if caught early.

### SQUASH ROTTING ON VINES

They'll suck your leaves dry and can be removed by hand, but are more easily controlled if caught early.



# WINTER SQUASH

*Butternut, Acorn Squash, Spaghetti Squash, Pumpkins*

## BASIC CARE

### SUN

Full exposure 6-8 hours a day

### WATER

- Pour water directly into the soil at the base of the plant, not on the leaves or fruits.
- Keep soil consistently moist but not overly wet.
  - > To test: push finger one inch deep into soil, if dry, add water.

### HARVESTING

- Winter squash normally mature in 80-120 days, and can be planted once soils warm in the spring.
- Winter squash have a hard, protective when mature - don't harvest before this has a chance to develop.
- When ready for harvesting, winter squash should be full color (no green pumpkins!) and the vine will be starting to die.
- Using shears/knife, remove the fruits with the stem attached.

### STORING

Store in a cool, dark, dry location.

## COMMON PROBLEMS

### SQUASH FLOWERING BUT NOT FRUITING

- You may have to hand-pollinate them! Check out this informative video/guide. You can be a matchmaker for squash!
- Because winter squash have a longer maturity time, you'll want to look closely for signs of fruit development and step in to pollinate if needed, before you miss your chance at delicious squash.

### SQUASH BUGS

They'll suck your leaves dry and can be removed by hand, but are more easily controlled if caught early.

**NOTE: Winter squash are so-called because they are harvested at the end of the summer and generally store better than summer squash - thus making them more available to folks during the winter. You actually plant them in late spring!**



## NEED HELP?

Email [gardens@foodwellalliance.org](mailto:gardens@foodwellalliance.org) with questions regarding care for your plants.

UGA Extension Agents (and Master Gardeners) can also offer advice on specific questions.

TRY THESE  
FUN RECIPES!



## PLANT A ROW

• The **Plant a Row** program helps pair gardeners who have extra produce with food pantries and kitchens that can distribute it to people in need. Historically, a lot of these organizations/charities have relied on shelf-stable foods to store and distribute, so having fresh produce (which is a lot more expensive and a lot less easy to store) can be a nutrient-rich and welcomed addition.

• Home gardeners are welcome to participate - to get involved, you can check out [foodwellalliance.org](http://foodwellalliance.org), or email [gardens@foodwellalliance.org](mailto:gardens@foodwellalliance.org) with questions.