

# CONTAINER GARDENING



Emmanuel Mwesige

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Kampala-Uganda  
+256781917493 & +256700857371

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Kampala-Uganda

Tel: 0773718502

Email: [conemedi2017@gmail.com](mailto:conemedi2017@gmail.com)

Typeset by: Kriston Enterprises (U) Ltd

Tel: 0704004263/0778954346

Email: [kristonenterprisesltd@yahoo.com](mailto:kristonenterprisesltd@yahoo.com)

## DEDICATION

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**This book is dedicated to all actual and potential container gardeners; they are the very reason it has been written!**

## CONTAINER GARDENING



BBA (Hons) Mak

Mobile: +256704004263 / +256778954346

Email: [emmanuel.mwesige@gmail.com](mailto:emmanuel.mwesige@gmail.com)

Facebook: Mwesige Emmanuel

LinkedIn: Mwesige Emmanuel

Skype: mwesige.emmanuel1

Agriculturalist. Research specialist. Business  
administration expert

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Emmanuel Mwesige** is a very passionate farmer and because of his passion for agriculture, he chose to start putting in black and white all issues concerning agriculture for future generations to refer to in the event that those that have the knowledge have all passed on.

He has practiced farming right from the age of 10 years and has never looked backed. Implying that he is knowledgeable about whatever he chooses to write about.

He is also a business administrator majoring in accounting.

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## INTRODUCTION TO CONTAINER GARDENING



Man in his effort to satisfy his hunger discovered that domestication of animals and the cultivation of crops are better ways of securing food for his family. Today with the rapid urbanization rate, when there is not much space to grow crops in the city, we are challenged to find alternative, simple and practical ways of growing crops.

The Republic of Uganda has gone through extensive urbanization nationwide. This has given rise to many urban problems such as slums, garbage, malnutrition, social alienation, poverty, and food insecurity.

Today - whether we admit it or not - we are confronted with exorbitant costs of food, especially for vegetables. Studies say that the average Ugandan household spends more than 30 % of its income for food also, while the Ugandans have to allocate almost 70 % of their available household budget to feed their families. What makes an ordinary vegetable cost too high? Firstly, there are the high production inputs in terms of fertilizers and other agro-chemicals, labor and transportation. So-called organic vegetables, grown without agro-chemicals, are even higher priced due to the increased labor inputs needed and the lower yields usually obtained. Aside from the cost, we here in the city can seldom avail freshly picked vegetables. This is because most of these vegetables displayed and sold in the market today were grown from distant places, such as Kabale, Kayunga, Kikyusa, Kiboga, and Kalangala, to name a few.

This book presents a way to offer accessibility and affordability of fresh and highly nutritious vegetable for family consumption through “container gardening”.

**Gardening in containers** is a fascinating way of growing plants. It has expanded the horizons of gardening for homeowners and often has provided the only way to garden for apartment and condominium dwellers.

Container gardening is exactly what it sounds like growing a garden solely in containers! Think you do not have enough room to have a

garden? Think again! The beauty of container gardening is that you can have a garden practically anywhere.

Container gardening goes far beyond a few flower pots on your front porch. If vegetables are your favorite, why not start a vegetable container garden? Think that is impossible? That is where you would be wrong. Many vegetables and fruits can easily be grown in containers. Personally, I had a similar view about container gardening. I used to think it is limited to only flowers, but that ended the day I successfully grew strawberries in an old jerrican. From that time till now, I have grown several vegetables in containers and the family has indeed enjoyed them and they are also picking immense interest in this whole idea of container gardening, something that they were initially laughing at.



Planting in containers has also provided a contemporary aspect to gardening. The use of unusual plants in unusual pots and containers provides interest and colour to surroundings that were once considered drab and stereotyped.

This form of gardening has been especially rewarding for those who have only a patio, deck or balcony on which to grow plants. Container plants provide the right touch needed for contrast and interest in these spaces. They are the accessories that make the scene comfortable and complete.



Growing vegetables is great fun, good exercise and a sure way to more nutritious eating. But for many of us, simply wanting to plant a garden may not be enough. We may lack a good site, or be too busy with

other things. Container gardening is a simple and fun way to grow edible crops in just about any situation.

It is growing in popularity because it is easy to get started and enables anyone to be successful- including those who think they have a “brown thumb”. Even if you have an in-ground vegetable garden you may find it desirable to have edible containers of herbs and salad greens near the kitchen door.





## BENEFITS OF CONTAINER GARDENING

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Used functionally to grow produce in a small space or as an accoutrement to the landscape, container gardens have many benefits to offer. Among the many benefits include:

**Maximum utilization of space.** With the right growing containers and growing media, many fruits and vegetables can be produced in all types of spaces: vertical or horizontal. With proper planning and design vegetables can even be grown inside the house. Another possibility is to practice multi-story cropping even in a very limited space. For example, vegetables can be grown in a high rise balcony as long as they have six hours of sunlight.



**Perfect for all kinds of people.** Kids, people with physical limitations, college students, renters, novice gardeners, and any gardener wanting to cut back, downsize, and save time. (You can water and harvest 10 containers in 10 minutes.). Actually, for parents with kids at home, a container garden adds enjoyment, visual interest, and opportunities to teach children about food and nutrition.

**There is minimal digging or tilling.** You can garden in the rain without getting your shoes muddy!

**Convenience and Time.** Most city people will agree that food tastes better in the villages. That is because people living in rural areas do not have to travel long distances to get their food. They pick their

vegetables fresh from their backyard gardens a few minutes before cooking. Everybody knows too that the fresher the vegetable the better it is in terms of nutritional content aside from its taste. One can just imagine how wonderful it is to have in an arm's length, fresh ingredients every time you wish to cook a delicious and nutritious meal.

**Environmentally friendly.** Container gardening has many plus factors aside from the obvious ones of saving money for the person growing the vegetables. It can help “green” the city and reduce air pollution. It can prevent irresponsible disposal of discarded containers and reduce the volume of garbage by reusing these as recycled planting containers. Organic garbage such as kitchen scraps and anything that decays may be processed into compost, which shall be incorporated into the growing medium. This will beautify the city since waste products are transformed into reusable containers and growing media. With container gardening people will not just talk about improving the environment but are actually doing something about it.



**Economical.** As earlier mentioned, most of the food consumed in the cities has to be transported from the far-off regions. This explains why prices for vegetables are getting increasingly higher. Several surveys on family income and expenditure reveal that of the total household expenditure, 43.9% comprised for food consumed at home. Assuming that for most low wage earners income equals expenditure, then a conservative estimate for the average monthly expenditure would be **UGX 4,000/day** or a total of **UGX 1,440,000** annually. Every vegetable that is produced by container gardening can reduce the amount of money spent for buying it from outside.

**Personal growth and development.** Any person who pursues container farming will be spiritually and emotionally invigorated (energized). It will foster a calmer nature and will give the grower a sense of purpose. Container gardening can convert extra time into a leisurely productive one.



**Water control:** When a container gardener waters his/her container garden, he/she can more easily observe how the water is being absorbed by the soil. If there is need to retain more moisture or there is need for better drainage the gardener can easily amend his/her container garden soil to create the optimum soil environment for the plants. This can help the gardener conserve water by reducing waterings.

## ESTABLISHING A CONTAINER GARDEN

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As it is with any other agribusiness venture, establishing a container garden will start with careful planning. Emphasis should be given to the following areas:

**Location.** Incorporating containers into outdoor living space requires some basic knowledge about the needs of the plants you want to grow. An eye for design will produce more pleasing, aesthetic results.

Containers can be placed on any level surface - decks, balconies, and along driveways and sidewalks. You can also set them on bare ground and allow the plant roots to grow down into the soil or place them on top of a mulched area. Edibles can also be grown in hanging baskets and window boxes.

You will need 6-8 hours of direct sun for warm-season crops (tomato, pepper, eggplant, squash) and 3-5 hours of direct sun for cool-season crops (lettuce, spinach, Asian greens).



Easy access to water is crucial. Some containers will need watering every day when the weather is hot and dry.

Consider the microclimate in the container garden area. Watch out for heat sinks created by brick, concrete, and reflective surfaces.

**Choosing what to plant.** After having decided on the garden location, the next step is to decide on what to plant. In determining the type and kind of vegetables and fruits to plant, we should take the number, respective ages, and the nutritional needs of family members as our basis for decision making.

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