

The Pot-to-Plant Match Cheat Sheet

by Lorna Whitcombe

Match one beginner-friendly container crop to the sunlight and pot size you already have. Keep this sheet by your pots — then go deeper with the full step-by-step guide when you're ready.



Pot-to-Plant Match in 3 steps

1 Check sun

Count hours of *direct* sunlight on your patio, balcony, or courtyard spot (not just how bright it looks).

2 Check pot

Confirm depth and approximate volume, plus drainage holes. Bigger often means steadier moisture.

3 Pick the crop

Choose a vegetable or herb whose sun and pot needs fit what you can provide — then check the seed packet.

Crop	Min. direct sun (hrs/day)	Min. pot size (depth · approx. volume)	Days to harvest*	One-line tip
Loose-leaf lettuce	4–6	6–8 in · ~1–2 gal	30–45	Cool-season favorite; pick outer leaves and let the center keep growing.
Radishes (small round)	4–6	6–8 in · ~1–2 gal	25–35	Thin early so roots can swell; choose round types over long-rooted ones.
Spinach	4–6	6–8 in · ~1–2 gal	28–55	Best in cool weather; heat often triggers bolting and bitter leaves.
Swiss chard	4–6	8 in · ~2 gal	30–55	Cut outer leaves for a long “cut-and-come-again” harvest.
Green onions	4–6	6 in · ~1–2 gal	60–100†	Keep potting mix evenly moist; thin by harvesting young plants.
Basil	6+	6–8 in · ~2 gal	50–75	Pinch growing tips often; harvest leaves before heavy flowering.
Bush beans	6–8	8–12 in · ~2–5 gal	45–60	Warm-season crop; give each plant room — “bush” is not tiny.
Peppers	6–8	8–12 in · ~2–5 gal	60–90‡	One plant per pot; needs warm weather (and warm nights) to set fruit.
Bush cucumber	6–8	8–12 in · ~3–5 gal	50–70	Choose bush or compact varieties; keep water steady in hot weather.
Compact / patio tomato	6–8	12 in · 5–8 gal	55–80	One plant per pot; look for patio, dwarf, bush, or compact labels.

*Typical ranges from seed unless noted; varieties and weather vary widely — always check your seed packet and local USDA zone / Cooperative Extension advice.

†From seed; sets or transplants are often faster. ‡Typical from transplant; from seed often longer (about 100+ days for many bell types). Figures are starting points for beginners, not guarantees. Prefer a slightly larger pot in hot, drying sites.

Want the full step-by-step guide? **Vegetables Without a Yard** (payhip.com/b/7K1hl) — sunlight, pot size, planting, and care for your first container crop.

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Sources (US Cooperative Extension & brand report): Virginia Cooperative Extension pub. 426-336 *Vegetable Gardening in Containers* (sun, min. container volume, days to harvest); University of Maryland Extension *Growing Vegetables in Containers and Salad Tables & Types of Containers for Growing Vegetables* (volumes; basil 2–5 gal); Wisconsin Horticulture / UW-Madison Extension *Growing Vegetables in Containers* (depth & volume bands); Colorado State University Extension GardenNotes #724 *Vegetable Gardening in Containers* (depths & min. direct sun hours); University of Maryland Extension *Growing Spinach in a Home Garden* (28–55 days; 4–6 hrs light); N.C. Cooperative Extension planting tables (basil 50–75 days from seed). Depths/volumes for lettuce, radishes, bush beans, and patio tomatoes aligned with *Vegetables Without a Yard* (Lorna Whitcombe). Full sun for fruiting crops ≈ 6–8+ hrs/day per VCE and the report.