

SEEDS IN THE CITY

Printable
Container Garden
Reference Guides

BALCONY STARTER GUIDE

Introduction

Growing food in the city often begins with a small realization: you don't need a yard to grow something useful.

A balcony, a patio corner, or even a narrow outdoor ledge can support herbs, vegetables, and edible plants when the basic conditions are right.

The goal of this guide is simple. Remove the intimidation that often stops people from starting.

Balcony gardens do not require perfect conditions. They require a few simple elements working together: light, containers, and water.

Once those three pieces are understood, even the smallest space can become productive.

The Seeds in the City series was created around this idea: small spaces can still grow real food.

The Three Essentials of a Balcony Garden

1. Sunlight

Most edible plants need at least 5–6 hours of direct sunlight per day.

Balconies that face south or west usually receive the most consistent light. East-facing balconies can also work well for herbs and leafy greens.

If your balcony receives only partial sun, focus on herbs and smaller leafy plants rather than fruiting vegetables.

2. Containers

Containers are the “soil environment” for your plants. The size of the container affects how much water and nutrients the plant can access.

Larger containers usually lead to healthier plants because the roots have more space and the soil stays stable longer.

Choose containers with drainage holes so excess water can escape.

3. Water

Container plants dry out faster than garden beds.

Balcony plants typically need watering once per day during warm months, though larger containers may require less frequent watering.

The goal is steady moisture, not soaked soil.

Best Beginner Plants for Balconies

Some plants adapt extremely well to containers and small spaces. These are excellent starting points for new gardeners.

Basil

A fast-growing herb that thrives in warm sunlight. Basil grows well in medium containers and responds well to regular harvesting.

Mint

Very resilient and forgiving. Mint grows aggressively, so it performs best in its own container.

Parsley

A slower-growing herb that tolerates partial sun and cooler temperatures.

Thyme

A compact herb that prefers well-drained soil and moderate watering.

Cherry Tomatoes

One of the most rewarding balcony crops. Choose compact or patio varieties for container success.

Green Onions

Easy to grow and quick to harvest. They can even regrow from kitchen scraps when placed in soil.

Container Size Guide

Container size influences root health, water retention, and overall plant stability.

Small Herbs

6–8 inch pots

Suitable for thyme, oregano, and small herbs.

Medium Herbs

8–10 inch pots

Ideal for basil, parsley, and cilantro.

Fruiting Plants

12–16 inch containers

Recommended for tomatoes, peppers, and larger edible plants.

Larger containers generally produce more stable plants because the soil holds moisture longer.

Simple Balcony Layout Example

A basic balcony garden can be organized in three zones:

Back Rail

Use taller containers for plants that need strong sunlight such as tomatoes.

Side Walls

Place medium containers with herbs that tolerate partial shade.

Front Edge or Table

Smaller pots with herbs used frequently in cooking.

This layout allows taller plants to receive the most sunlight while smaller plants remain accessible.

Watering Basics

The most common balcony gardening challenge is inconsistent watering.

A simple approach works best.

Check soil moisture with your finger. If the top inch of soil feels dry, it is time to water.

Water slowly until excess water drains from the bottom of the container.

Morning watering is usually ideal because it prepares plants for the heat of the day.

Common Beginner Mistakes

Containers Too Small

Small containers dry out quickly and restrict root growth.

Overplanting

Crowded plants compete for water and nutrients.

Not Enough Sunlight

Some balconies appear bright but receive very little direct sun.

Inconsistent Watering

Allowing containers to dry out completely can stress plants.

Start Small

The most successful balcony gardens usually begin with only a few plants.

A small collection of herbs can produce surprising amounts of food and quickly build confidence.

Over time, many balcony gardeners expand their containers, experiment with new plants, and refine their layout.

Continue the Journey

If you enjoyed this guide, the Seeds in the City series explores small-space gardening in more depth.

Topics include:

- indoor vegetable gardening
- balcony garden design
- herb growing for small spaces
- practical container systems

Small spaces can still grow real food.

Sometimes all it takes is the first container.