

How to Make a Self-Watering Planter

Local Food Learning & Leadership Program



STEP #1 Gather Supplies



- 1 tote with lid
- 2 plastic baskets that fit in bottom of tote
- 1" or 2" PVC pipe
- Small flexible tubing
- Drill with small and large bits
- Hacksaw or mitre saw
- 2 cubic feet of potting soil
- Organic fertilizer
- Dolomite Lime

Potting Mix: Use a soil-less potting mix rather than garden soil, as it wicks water better.

Dolomite Lime: adds calcium and raises the pH of the potting mix.

Fertilizer: The three numbers of the elements making up the fertilizer content (NPK) should be in the range of 5 to 15. I have used 4-6-8 organic fertilizer.

STEP #2 Cut hole in lid



Use a utility knife or scissors to cut out centre of lid. We will be using the rim, so don't cut through that.

Self-watering planters are a great way to grow your favourite fruits and vegetables year-round. With a built-in watering reservoir, these planters are low-maintenance and very productive.



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STEP #3 Drilling and Cutting



Choose a drill bit that is just slightly larger than the PVC tube, and drill a hole in one of the plastic baskets. Then drill many small holes over both baskets. These holes will allow roots to go through to the air and water below.

For the watering tube, cut it slightly longer than the tote is tall, and cut the bottom off at an angle so the water can get out.

For the small flexible tube, cut it several inches long.

STEP #4 Overflow Tube



Drill a hole in the tote just below the height of the basket.



When the basket is inside the tote, the tube will run from the basket outside of the tote. This overflow tube ensures that there is always a ½ inch airspace between the soil and the water.

STEP #5 Set up planter for soil



Place both baskets in bottom of tote. Stand watering tube (PVC pipe) in its hole. Ensure overflow tube is still in place.

STEP #6 Potting Soil



Fill the tote half-way with potting soil.



STEP #7 Add Dolomite Lime



Since Potting soil contains peat moss, it is too acidic for most vegetable plants, that's why we add Dolomite Lime to the soil.

Add 1 pound of Dolomite lime, and mix in with lower soil.

STEP #8 Fill top of bin with soil



Fill to top of tote and mix upper soil with the dolomite lime from below. Next year, before re-planting, mix a bit of dolomite in the top few inches of the potting mix.

STEP #9 Make trench and add fertilizer



Make trench lengthwise in middle, and put 3 cups of organic fertilizer in trench. Cover with potting soil. Do not plant directly in this trench area. Next year, before re-planting, scoop out the old fertilizer strip, and add 3 cups of new organic fertilizer.

STEP #10 Water the soil



This is the only time you will water this planter from the top. Water it well to saturate the potting soil with water. When the water comes out of the overflow valve, stop watering.



STEP #11 Covering



Cover with black plastic garbage bag. This is the mulch which keeps the soil moist and warm, and keeps weeds from growing.

STEP #12 Planting



Use scissors to cut through the black plastic.



Plant seeds or transplants through the plastic into the soil.

THE FINAL PRODUCT



These planters can be used either indoors or outdoors. When the plants are small, the planters only need to be watered once per week.

Water them through the watering tube – stop watering when water comes out of the overflow valve. Indoor planters should be near a bright window or indoor grow lights for about 12 hours/day. A fan will help to strengthen indoor plants.

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