

What's in my Kit:

- Container
- 6 pack of plants
- Potting soil mixed with worm castings



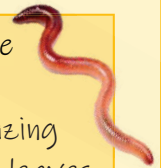
Basil

Nasturtium

Kale

Chard

The worm castings are dark brown and very small. Worms are amazing *decomposers* that eat leaves and fruit, and turn them into food for plants! The soil mixture is the bed for your plants to grow in, providing stability, moisture, air and nutrients for the plants.



Making the “bed” for your plants:

All happy gardens start with healthy soil! What is soil? Soil (or dirt) is made up of tiny pieces of broken rock, air, water and *organic material* (stuff that used to be alive). The soil provided for your container garden is potting soil from GreenTree, a local soil business, and some worm *castings* (or worm manure) have been added for nutrients. The potting soil is very dry and fluffy brown (partly from the hairy shells of coconut!) with little white puffy balls, called perlite, which is a mineral.

To prepare your soil:

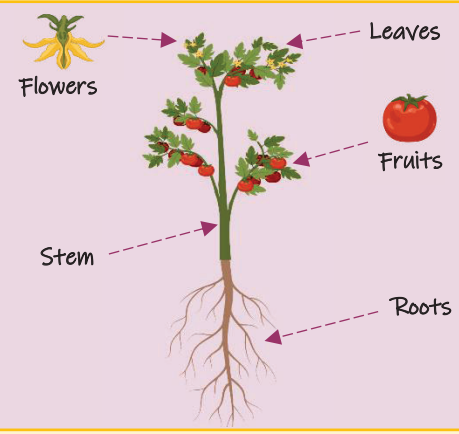
(Warning, you may get dirty! An important part of gardening...) It is best to set up somewhere that is easy to clean up, like outside or on a kitchen table that you can sweep or wipe when done.)



Before you put your plants in their new home, you must *hydrate* - or add water to- the soil. It works best to use a big bucket, cooking pot, or tupperware container. Pour the soil in and mix with your hands. Add water slowly while you keep mixing with your hands. When the soil is ready, you will be able to make a ball of soil in your hands and squeeze it. Stop adding water when it feels like a damp sponge. Now you can put all that beautiful, hydrated soil into your container. Pat the soil gently into your container, but do not push too hard, it needs to stay loose so air can stay in the soil.

Parts of a plant:

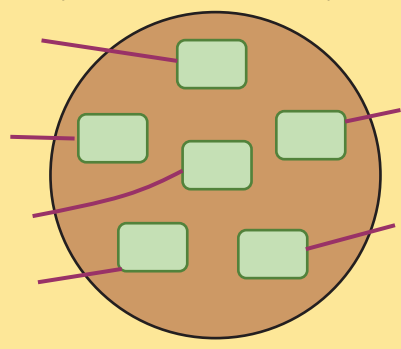
Each of your plants hold themselves securely in place below ground using their **roots**. The roots also absorb water. Above the soil, the plant has a **stem** for support, **leaves** to catch sunlight and **photosynthesize** (make food for the plant), and eventually, **flowers** may bloom and produce **fruit** on some plants.



Arrange your plants:

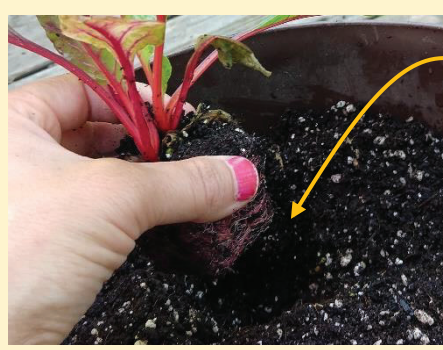
Your plants will all be cozy in their new home together. Ithaca Children’s Garden specifically chose these plants because they grow well together. Still you will want to give them as much space as possible, so find a way to fit them all in the circle with space between

Make a garden map by labeling your plants.



Dig a hole:

Hands work great; a large spoon or a little hand shovel (**trowel**) can also work. Place the plant in the hole. The top of the container soil should be level with the top of the root ball. Fill in soil all around the root ball and pat soil down gently so that all the soil is touching.



The hole should be the same size as your plant’s root ball.

Transplanting: Moving your baby plants into their new home!

Your plants are getting bigger and are ready to move into a larger home - your container garden! When your soil is hydrated and in the container, it is time to get your baby plants into their new home!

Removing plants from the 6-pack: This part requires a lot of care to not damage the baby plant or disturb the roots too much.

1. Water the plants so that the soil in the 6-pack is damp.
2. Find the bottom of each little plant, where the soil and roots are. Pinch the plastic cell gently in both directions to loosen the soil within.
3. You may want to turn the 6-pack on its side to make it easier to remove each plant
4. Gently and carefully hold the bottom of the stem to guide the plant out while you push from the bottom (*do not tug or yank*, as this may break the stem)
5. If you have trouble, a plastic spoon can help
6. When all your plants are planted, water your new garden well

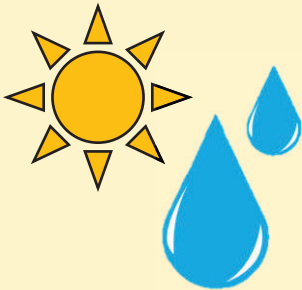
Taking care of your Container Garden!

For plants to be healthy, they need light, water and soil. They also need to be monitored often by you, the gardener.



The soil is all prepared, thanks to the work you did to plant your garden!

The light available to your plants will depend on where you place your container garden. If you have different places where your garden can go, consider a location that gets lots of sun but is still close enough to your apartment or house that you will remember to look at it and take care of it every day. If you have a step or a patio that gets a lot of sun, this would be an ideal place.



You will need to water your garden regularly. Each time you visit your garden, touch the soil and see how it feels. Generally, be prepared to water your garden every day. Make sure you water gently (more like a shower spraying and less like a fire hose) and deliver the water to the soil where the roots are, not on the leaves or flowers of the plants.

Try making your own watering can!



1 Gather a plastic milk jug. 2 Get parental help to poke holes through the cap, by warming it with a lighter. 3 4

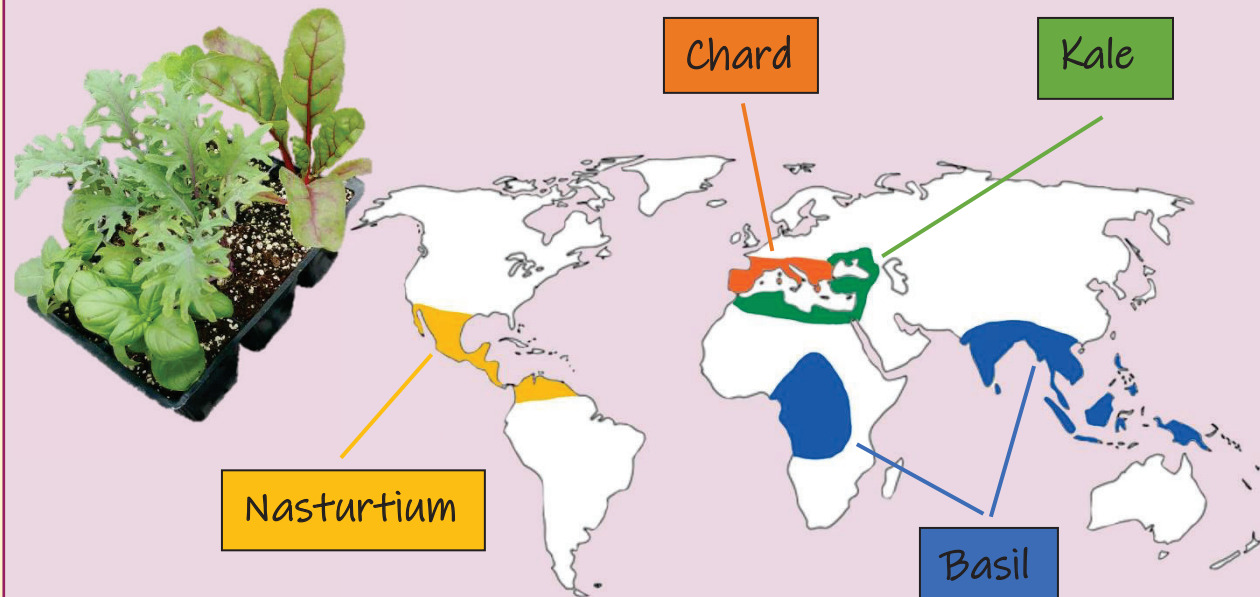
As you visit your plants each day, spend some time observing how they have changed. Do you see any new leaf buds? Maybe a flower is forming or some insects are enjoying the blossoms? Noticing the changes in your plants is part of what makes gardening SO rewarding. Being attentive will also allow you to see when your plants are ready to harvest and eat. Take pictures, make drawings, write stories, measure growth and also ask questions. Do research if you have questions you cannot answer from your own observations.

Consider reading your plants a story, or singing them a song. Plants can be good friends and peaceful companions. Do you know a good garden song?

Enjoy your new container garden and the food and delights that the plants may bring you and your family! Hopefully, you are inspired and excited to garden, and grow your own food. We can learn a lot about science, math, nature, taking care of the earth, and even social justice when growing our own food. What does it mean to you?



Where are these plants from?



Swiss Chard

Swiss chard is known for its bright colors. It looks just as beautiful in the garden as it does on your plate. It's a relative to beets and sometimes called spinach beet.

How to harvest: Harvest your chard when the leaves become 8-12 inches long (use a ruler- this is BIG!). Harvesting only the outer leaves allows the middle of the plant to keep growing and producing. Leaving at least 4 leaves at all times keeps your chard healthy and continuing to grow.

How to use: You can eat swiss chard leaves and stems raw or cooked. It can be used in any dish that calls for spinach. When chard is cooked it loses its bitterness and tastes a bit sweeter. Try it sautéed, added to salads, or in scrambled eggs or soups.

Chard is known for its beauty - draw a picture of the colorful stems and textured leaves. We'd love to see your creations. Email your creations to: erin@ithacachildrengarden.org



Look at the beautiful stems and leaves!

Kale

Kale is a super vegetable! Full of nutrients, kale comes in shades of green and purple. It's leaves can be smooth, bumpy, or curly. Kale grows through much of the year and can be harvested well into the fall.

How to harvest: Harvesting only the outer leaves allows the middle of the plant to keep growing and producing. Cut the stems with scissors or snap them with your fingers. Leave at least 4 leaves at all times and it will keep producing through the fall.

How to eat: Kale stems are tough and fibrous, but become softer when cooked. Some people prefer just using the leaves which can easily be ripped from the stem. Kale can be steamed, sautéed or stir fried. It can be added to soups, salads, and casseroles. The young leaves are good in salads and the bigger older leaves are good for cooking.



Make some kale chips!
Recipe on the back.

Nasturtium: A gardener's favorite flower

Nasturtiums are not only cheerful and beautiful, they also help keep pests, like aphids, away from other vegetables. And, you can eat the leaves AND flowers! Plant your nasturtium at the edge of your pot so it cascades over the side.

How to Harvest: Fresh leaves and flowers can be harvested through the growing season by being pinched off from their stem.

How to use: The flowers, stems, and leaves can be eaten raw. Nibble for a snack or added to salads. Decorate a cake with the beautiful flowers. Nasturtiums have a strong peppery flavor.



Taste the flowers and the leaves. Do they taste the same? Like anything familiar?

Describe how nasturtium tastes!
what adjectives would you use to describe how nasturtiums taste? Write them down or share with a family member.

Basil

6

Basil has a distinct scent and flavor. It's in the same plant family as mint. Feel the stem. Does it feel square to you? That's one way to tell if a plant is in the mint family.

How to harvest: Harvest just the basil you're going to use right now. If you only pinch a few leaves off at a time, your basil will continue to grow throughout the summer and early fall. Try pinching off the leaves at the top of the stem. This will prevent flowers from forming so your plant gives all its energy to growing the leaves we like to eat.

How to eat: Fresh basil is a treat! Add it to tomato sauce, pizza, and salad dressing. Cut basil into strips with scissors and sprinkle on top of pasta, salads, or pizza.



A familiar smell often reminds us of something special in our lives. Mowed grass on warm summer days. Cookies baking in the oven. If the basil is a familiar smell, what does it remind you of? Is there a smell that always makes you feel happy and relaxed?

Homemade Pesto

Ingredients:

2 cups of fresh basil leaves, packed (don't have enough basil? Add some spinach)

½ cup grated Romano or Parmesan cheese

½ cup olive oil

3 garlic cloves, minced (about 3 tsp)

¼ tsp salt

⅛ tsp pepper

⅓ cup pine nuts, walnuts, cashews, or sunflower seeds (optional)

Directions: Blend all ingredients in a blender or food processor until a paste forms. Add pesto to soup or pizza, mix it with pasta or use it as a dip.

Kale Chips!

Ingredients:

Ripped kale leaves

Olive oil

Salt and your choice of seasonings

Directions:

Rip pieces of Kale from its stem into 1 inch pieces.

Add them to a bowl and drizzle with oil and herbs.

Mix so that the oil and seasoning are dispersed evenly. Arrange the leaves on a baking sheet in a

single layer. Cook in an oven at 300 degrees until the

edges are browned and the leaves are crispy. Turn the leaves after about 10 minutes. Bake 10 more minutes and carefully remove from oven, cool, and enjoy! Add them to a bowl and drizzle with oil and your favorite seasoning: Keep it simple with salt and pepper, Sweeten it up with brown sugar and a bit of salt, Make it spicy with paprika, salt, and red pepper flakes. Experiment - add the spices and flavors you like best.



**Ithaca
Children's
Garden**

Ithaca Children's Garden loved making this Container Garden Kit especially for you. Ithaca Children's Garden is free and open daily to all. Come visit to see what's growing!