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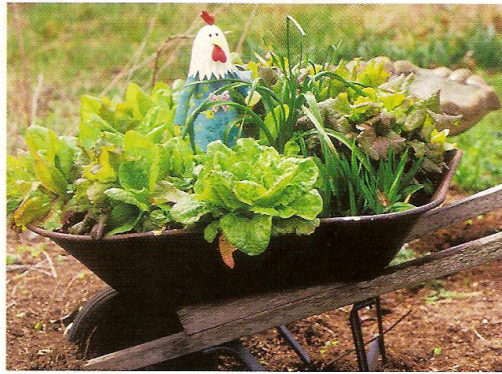
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conventionally grown in my area due to the short season, but in a self-watering container, they grow fast enough. Why?

It appears that water is the key. As long as there is water in the reservoir, the soil throughout the container is always moist, and the plants growing in it always have enough water, but not too much. In a traditional container, the soil contains as much water as it can hold only for a short time after watering. From then on, the soil—and the plants growing in it—have progressively less water available. Plants become stressed and suffer some interruption of growth whenever they have insufficient water, and self-watering containers eliminate that possibility.

Most self-watering containers are rectangular plastic, in some shade of green or



WILLIAM D. ADAMS; BELOW: NATE SNOW

This quirky salad garden can be wheeled indoors when frost or other undesirable weather threatens.

brown. But there also are round, square and hanging containers in many other colors. They have various ways to get the water from the reservoir to the soil, and different ways to add water to the reservoir and register the water level. And, in my experience, they all work, although some inexpensive containers advertised as self-watering have reservoirs that are too small

to offer any advantage over traditional containers.

The critical differences have to do with size: How much soil can it hold (and how deep is the soil?), and how much water? Big plants need big pots (I like about 40 quarts of soil for artichokes or summer squash). Soil 8 inches deep satisfies most plants, and 5 or 6 inches is enough for salad greens, but carrots need 12 inches. Reservoirs need to be big enough to allow at least three or four days between waterings.

I like at least 1 quart of water for every 8 quarts of soil, but more is better. Self-watering containers are available from the suppliers listed on Page 54, and you also can make your own—see “DIY Self-watering Container,” below.

DIY Self-watering Container

You can make your own self-watering container from a couple of 5-gallon plastic buckets. (From our food co-op, I've scored free buckets that had housed peanut butter and other such things.)

MATERIALS:

- 2 5-gallon plastic buckets
- 1 plastic funnel (from hardware or home supply stores)

TOOLS:

- Drill with a quarter-inch bit
- Saber saw

1. Fit one bucket inside the other bucket. The space between the respective bucket bottoms is the reservoir.
2. Mark an oblong hole in the side of the outer bucket about an inch high and 2 inches long, so the top of the hole is even with the bottom of the inner bucket. Cut it out with the saber saw. This hole serves triple-duty as the fill hole, the overflow hole and the place to stick a finger to gauge how full the reservoir is.
3. Cut a hole in the bottom of the inner bucket large enough so the funnel will project into the reservoir all the way to the bottom.
4. If necessary, cut the bottom off the funnel so it is about a half inch longer than the space between the bucket bottoms.
5. Drill a dozen or so holes at random in the bottom of the inner bucket.
6. Fit the inner bucket into the outer bucket; insert the funnel. Fill the top bucket with moist container soil, making sure that the funnel is filled, but not packed with soil. Fill the reservoir, and you're ready to plant! (See “Selecting Soils,” Page 54.)
7. There is a kit available for \$15 at Gardener's Supply (www.gardeners.com) that can be inserted into any fairly large (15 to 20 quarts or more) round container. The result is a self-watering container with a 4-quart reservoir. Be sure to make an overflow hole in the container if it doesn't already have one.



Incredible Vegetables from S-W Containers by Ed Smith