

## Your Balcony Garden: Potable Tomatoes for the Passive Gardener

Vegetables may not excite you. It takes an extra button or two at the self-checkout to purchase them anyway. And you certainly are not a green thumb. That's exactly why this article is for you.

I'm not saying we are lazy, or anything, because despite the disadvantages with eating vegetables that you and I both recognize, we like the healthy side effects and everyone knows fresh vegetables are the most tasty. But we keep busy in a fast-paced world. You and I just don't have time to be farmers. Most of our produce is going to come from them anyway. Besides, if you are like me, you don't have a yard to have a garden. Even if you do have the space, you might like the option of gardening in pots. I am just starting to experiment with it.

I've already had successes and also failure. Gardening from your second story balcony has its unique challenges. At first, you figure that every plant needs enough soil, sun, and water. Then you realize that wind at that height could be damaging, or that certain plants will never have enough soil in the biggest of pots. *No, I didn't plant an apple tree or something like that, but I am struggling with the deep root needs of a zucchini plant.* If I block the wind roughing up the zucchini plant, then it doesn't get enough sun. I watered it more when I learned that balcony plants—due to being so high in the air—may dry out quicker and the extra watering seemed to be working; it flowered nicely for a while, but that is when I think the roots reached their limit. Half of my plant is dying, but new sets of flowers are trying. I've heard that it could be a problem where bees aren't finding my suspended garden and perhaps the pollen isn't being spread from the male flowers to the female flowers. The solution is said to be to manually do this with a cotton swab for fruit to follow. But again, how involved do you or a casual gardener like me want to be. It didn't work, in my case anyway.

My advice is to stick with plants that specifically state they are groomed for pots: although one of the two remaining tomato plant's that was intended for the ground, is still doing quite well (albeit, full grown tomatoes planted in pots become cherry tomatoes basically). The tomato plant for full-grown tomatoes produces a small yield, while the other tomato plant (intended for a pot) is a cherry tomato plant (with an expected small-sized return but more plentiful harvest). Well anyway, I didn't even bother trying to raise the plants from seeds either, but began with plants that were already started. For my experimental purposes, if I get two successful plants out of three, that's more tomatoes than I've had in a long while. So yeah, I'd say if I am able to grow tomatoes on my balcony, so can you. Give tomatoes a try, and then grow your garden options from there.

Here's how it worked: a brother of mine found me a couple 5 gallon buckets on the side of the road. No one else was using them, so he gave them to me. The lighter colored the better, so the sun doesn't overheat them as easily. It's also good if you know the buckets are clean of chemicals, which could be an outlying factor in my experiment. If cement powder or residue for instance is inside a bucket it could definitely adversely affect your plant by depriving it of the water it naturally absorbs so well. Anyway, I drilled like 6 to

8 one-inch holes in the bottom. You can place the bucket upside down, so as to not drill into your carpet, like I almost did. Not that you would. Gather and place some fist sized rocks in the bottom fourth of the bucket. Then find some good potting soil in a bag you can buy at a dollar store or wherever you buy your plants. Pour the soil in and level it off at the top of the bucket around the plant you place. That's it! Now water it daily from like a quart jar and be sure it gets enough sun against the shade of your home. Then enjoy the fact that the tomato plant withstands wind fairly well (though you may invest in a wired tomato cage to encircle its growth). At least your minimal garden could provide two affordable types of tomatoes for some great salsa, though it's growing a little late to test it out this summer.