

Pizza Garden Planter: Grow Your Own Pizza Toppings

Gardening | Spring | Ages 4-7

Last spring, my daughter announced she wanted to grow "pizza stuff" after we hit up the Overland Park Farmers' Market. We grabbed a large divided planter, some seedlings, and crossed our fingers. By July, we were topping homemade pizzas with our own tomatoes and basil. It's incredibly satisfying.

What You Need

- One large divided planter or pot (at least 18 inches across with drainage holes)
 - Potting soil
 - One cherry tomato plant (seedling works best)
 - Two basil plants (Genovese or sweet basil)
 - One small pepper plant (bell pepper or banana pepper for mild)
 - Watering can
 - Sunny spot (6+ hours of sun daily)

Step-by-Step Directions

Fill your planter with potting soil, leaving about two inches from the rim. If your pot doesn't have built-in dividers, just mentally section it into thirds.

Plant the tomato in one section. These guys need the most room. Basil goes in the middle — two plants side by side. The pepper takes the last spot.

Water everything thoroughly right after planting. The soil should be damp but not swampy.

Set your planter somewhere sunny. Our back patio gets afternoon sun, and that worked great. If you're apartment gardening, a balcony facing south or west is your best bet.

Daily Care Water every morning. Stick your finger in the soil — if the top inch is dry, water it. In Kansas City's July heat, you'll probably water twice a day.

Pinch off basil flowers as they appear. This keeps the plant producing leaves instead of going to seed. Let your kids do this part. They love it.

The tomato plant will get tall and might need a small stake or cage by June. We used a bamboo stake from City Garden and tied it with strips of old t-shirt.

What Actually Happens

Basil grows fast. You'll harvest leaves in about a month. Cherry tomatoes take longer — expect fruit by mid-July if you plant in May. Peppers are the slowpokes, but they'll come.

Here's the truth: your tomato plant will probably try to take over the whole pot. Trim back lower leaves that crowd the basil. Don't feel bad about it.

We made our first pizza in late July. My daughter picked the basil, I sliced the tomatoes, and we used bell peppers from our plant plus some from McGonigle's because ours were still tiny. She tells everyone about "her" pizza garden. Worth

every minute of watering.

Pro Tips Start with seedlings from a garden center, not seeds. It's spring — you want results before school starts again.

Cherry tomatoes work better than full-size in containers. They're sweeter anyway.

If you forget to water and things look droopy, don't panic. A good soak usually brings them back. We've done this more than once.

