

Success with Self-Watering Containers

Self-watering containers have special reservoirs that reduce watering chores and allow plants to draw moisture as they need it. Our one quart and four quart Adjustable Reservoirs allow you to convert your favorite pot into a convenient self-watering container.

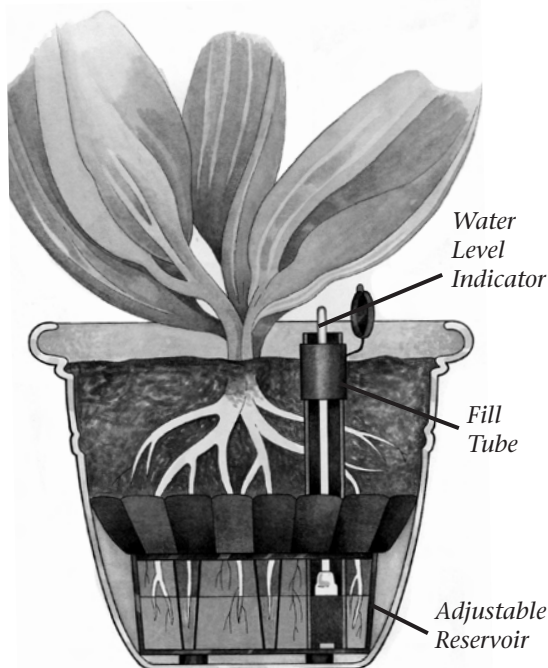
Retractable wings automatically adjust to fit pots between 10 and 14 inches for the small reservoir and 16 and 20 inches for the large reservoir.

Step 1. Prepare planter for drainage **BEFORE** adding soil.

If the container you are planting in is to be used outdoors, you may first need to drill holes in the bottom to allow water to drain out during heavy rains. **Drainage is very important; otherwise your plants may drown.** Most containers have marked areas on the bottom or on the side that show where you can drill holes for drainage. Some containers have removable plugs.

Step 2. Place the reservoir in the pot. The retractable wings will automatically adjust to the size of your planter and the top should snap into place.

Step 3. Place the Fill Tube in the tube slot in the top of the Reservoir. The Fill Tube has notches so you can adjust it to the desired height. Position the tube so that the top and lid will be above the soil line after planting.



Step 4. Place the Water Level Indicator into the top of the Fill Tube so that it rests on the bottom of the reservoir. With sharp scissors, trim off the top of the Indicator so that it sits 2 inches below the top of the Fill Tube. Once the reservoir has been filled with water, the Indicator will rise to the top of the tube. When the water level gets low, the Indicator will sink, letting you know it's time to refill the reservoir.

Step 5. Fill the Reservoir with water through the Fill Tube.

Step 6. You can now fill your container with planting mix. After planting, water the soil once from above to ensure the soil is moist throughout.

Planting Mix

Soil for container-grown plants should be light and friable, well drained and moisture-retentive. Garden soil is much too dense and can introduce disease and insect problems.

Most container-grown plants are happiest in a soilless blend comprised of sphagnum peat moss, perlite and finished compost.

It's easy to purchase a pre-mixed blend, such as our Self-Watering Container Mix, which is especially formulated for planters that wick moisture from a built-in reservoir. You can also create your own mixes using the following recipes as a guide.

- **Organic Blend:** 5 gallons finished compost, 1 dry gallon builder's sand, 1 gallon vermiculite or perlite, 1 cup granular-all purpose organic fertilizer.

- **Standard Blend:** 1 bushel vermiculite or perlite, 1 bushel ground sphagnum peat moss, 8 tablespoons super phosphate, 8 tablespoons ground limestone, 2 cups bone meal.

- **Light Blend (for rooftops):** 5 gallons ground sphagnum peat moss, 5 gallons vermiculite or perlite, 2 gallons compost, 1 cup granular all-purpose organic fertilizer.

Replenishing the Soil

Any soil mix will become depleted over time. If your containers seem dry and compact or water-logged and heavy, you may need to replace your soil mix at the start of a new growing season with a fresh mix. Or, you can replenish the soil with Container Booster Mix, which recharges depleted soil (see *Ordering Information*).

Watering

Self-watering containers have an upper area that holds the plant and soil, and a lower area or bottom reservoir that holds extra water. Soil and evaporation and sometimes a strip of absorbent fabric act as a wick to join the upper and lower areas, pulling water up into the root ball as it's needed. Most reservoirs are

large enough to supply water for several days or more depending on the weather.

If you go off to work in the morning on a hot sunny day, without watering your windowboxes or patio containers, you may come home to wilted, if not dead, plants. When plants get too dry, their delicate feeder roots die. Even after they are watered, the plants must concentrate their energy on re-growing damaged roots rather than producing fruit or flowers.

If you are using planters that are not self-watering, you'll probably need to check on your plants daily, and maybe even twice a day if the weather is really hot.



Watering Tips

- Start with a moisture-retentive planting mix that consists of at least 50% ground sphagnum moss and vermiculite or perlite
- Water until all the soil in the container is moist and water runs out the drainage holes.
- For large containers, reduce evaporation by covering the soil surface with a thin layer of mulch (shredded bark, leaf mold, dry grass clippings or straw.)
- Reduce moisture loss from leaf surfaces by using a lattice, trellis, awning or umbrella to shield plants from midday heat.
- Never water your plants with softened water. It contains dissolved salts that are toxic to plants. Rainwater (collect it in a barrel from your roof) is best.
- Cluster your potted plants to minimize moisture loss and increase humidity.

Fertilizing

Most container mixes provide few nutrients; your plants will be totally dependent on you for their food.

Add granular organic fertilizer to the soil at planting time, then water weekly with half-strength, water-soluble fertilizer. Foliar feed with seaweed or fish emulsion for a quick pick-me-up if your plants look stressed or have been cut back.

Liquid or a water-soluble fertilizers may be added directly to the water reservoir.

Maintenance

Each week during the growing season, remove spent flowers and pinch back leggy stems. As the season progresses, replace tired plants with some fresh annuals, especially late-season favorites, such as ornamental kale and mums.

Soil and water that is left in a container in winter can freeze and expand, causing your container to crack or split. To prevent damage, it is best to empty, clean and store your containers indoors before freezing weather sets in.

If you plan to overwinter your potted plants, some plants should be cut back and put in a cool location. Water sparingly and do not fertilize until spring. Once warm weather arrives, remove plants from their containers, tease away old soil, and repot the plants in a fresh soil blend.

Trellises and Supports

Vertical support is a necessity for container-grown tomatoes, cucumbers, and flowering vines. Trellises can also add a beautiful vertical accent when covered with morning glories or sweet peas. Keep the scale of the trellis in proportion to the pot, and be sure to attach it securely using brackets or wires.

Ordering Information

- #36-725 Adjustable Reservoir, small
- #34-507 Adjustable Reservoir, large
- #33-819 Self-Watering Container Mix, 20 qt

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