



FROM THE FILES OF THE DIRT DIVA DIARIES

# Container Starter Kit Checklist

Everything you need before your first seed goes in the ground

**Ivy says:** "Walking into a garden center for the first time can feel like entering a foreign country where everyone knows the language except you. This checklist is your translation guide. I've broken it down by category, flagged the budget-friendly swaps, and marked the stuff you absolutely cannot skip. Grab this, grab your cart, and let's get you set up right."

## CONTAINERS

### What to Get

- 5-gallon containers (×3-4)**  
Herbs, lettuce, peppers, beans  
*♥ Budget swap: 5-gal food-grade buckets — free from restaurants/bakeries*
- 10-gallon containers (×2)**  
Tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, potatoes  
*♥ Budget swap: Fabric grow bags, \$3-5 each*
- Window box or shallow tray**  
Lettuce, herbs, radishes, greens
- Saucers or pot feet**  
Protect deck/patio surfaces from water damage

## GROWING MEDIUM

### Soil Essentials

- Quality potting mix (NOT garden soil)**  
Look for: perlite, peat or coir, compost. Brands: Espoma, Fox Farm, Pro-Mix
- Extra perlite (optional but recommended)**  
Mix 10-15% into potting mix for better drainage and aeration
- Slow-release granular fertilizer**  
Mix in at planting time. Look for balanced NPK (5-5-5 or 10-10-10)

## TOOLS

### Hands-On Essentials

- Hand trowel**  
For transplanting and digging. Your most-used tool.
- Pruning snips / scissors**  
Harvesting herbs, deadheading, cutting stems cleanly
- Garden gloves (1 pair)**  
Protect hands from fertilizer, thorns, and soil
- Plant labels + waterproof marker**  
Trust me — you will forget what you planted where
- Stakes or tomato cages**  
For tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers. Buy before you need them.
- Drip tray / catch basin**  
For indoor or balcony containers — keeps floors dry

## WATERING

- Watering can with long spout**  
Gentle flow, directs water to soil not leaves. Essential for balconies.
- Garden hose with adjustable nozzle**  
For patio gardens. Gentle shower setting for seedlings.
- Moisture meter (optional)**  
Helpful for beginners; prevents overwatering. \$10-15.



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Seeds & Transplants · Budget Guide · Smart Swaps

## SEEDS & TRANSPLANTS

🌱 Start from Seed	🛒 Buy as Transplants	🔄 Either Way Works
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Lettuce / salad greens</b> Fast, easy, direct sow	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Tomatoes</b> Saves 6-8 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cucumbers</b> Easy from seed or transplant
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Radishes</b> Ready in 25-30 days	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Peppers &amp; eggplant</b> Need long head start	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Squash / zucchini</b> Fast from seed
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Beans / peas</b> Direct sow only	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Rosemary / perennial herbs</b> Buy once, harvest for years	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Kale / chard</b> Hardy, flexible
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Herbs (basil, dill, cilantro)</b> Quick germination		

## REALISTIC STARTER BUDGET

ITEM	ESTIMATED COST
Containers (4-6 mixed sizes)	\$20-40
Potting mix (2-3 cubic feet)	\$20-35
Basic tools (trowel, gloves, snips)	\$20-30
Seeds + transplants	\$20-40
Fertilizer	\$10-20
<b>Total First-Season Investment</b>	<b>\$90-165</b>

### ✗ Skip These — Don't Waste Money

- ✗ Gravel for container bottoms — actively harmful, not helpful
- ✗ Cheap potting mix under \$4/cu ft — mostly wood chips and filler
- ✗ "Moisture control" soil — not necessary with good watering habits
- ✗ Decorative containers without drainage holes (use as cachepots only)

### ✦ Ivy's Money-Saving Swaps

- ✦ Food-grade 5-gal buckets: free from bakeries/restaurants (drill holes)
- ✦ Fabric grow bags: \$3-5 each, last 3-5 seasons
- ✦ Buy seeds, not transplants, for lettuce, herbs & beans
- ✦ Ask neighbors for herb cuttings — rosemary roots easily in water