

Workshop: Recycled Self-watering containers

Background

In the city, it's often convenient to grow plants in containers. Self-watering containers (also called "sub-irrigated" containers) have a reservoir of water at the bottom that is wicked up to the growing medium by capillary action, where the roots absorb it as needed. The water reservoir reduces the rate of evaporation, meaning that you have to water less often, saving both water and time. It also encourages plants to develop a healthy, deep root system.

Supplies list:

- 2L Soda Bottles or smaller bottles for smaller planters
- Wick (can be yarn, twine, fabric strips; cotton is best, but other materials possible)
- Soil/potting mix
- Seeds or seedlings (herbs or lettuce are a good option)
- Coconut coir (*optional*)
- Fabric stopper (*optional*) a piece of fabric and elastic band

Tools needed:

- Scissors
- Small knife

Instructions

- Thoroughly rinse and clean the soda bottles and remove the labels
- Use a small knife to puncture a hole about one third down the bottle
- Use scissors to cut around the bottle to separate the two sections. The smaller portion with the bottle opening is the planter while the bottom portion will be the water reservoir
- Flip the bottle opening over into the bottom reservoir and see if it fits. You can trim the top with scissors to make it less jagged if needed
- Next, make the wick. Cut 3-4 long strands of yarn, twine or fabric strips. Tie the pieces together leaving about 2 inches at one end
- Place the wick into the bottom of the planter with the long end facing the bottom
- Hold the wick in place while filling the planter with soil. The soil will hold the wick in place. Spread the wick strings evenly through the soil.



- *If using a fabric stopper*, take a piece of fabric and secure it to the planter bottom with an elastic band. Puncture a small hole in the fabric with scissors or a small knife. Lead the wick through the hole with the long end facing down. The wick should be held in place by the knot. Fill the planter with soil while spreading the wick strings evenly through the soil
- *If using coconut coir*, hold the wick in place while filling a small amount of coconut coir to the bottom of the planter to hold the wick in place and provide maximum drainage. Fill the rest of the planter with soil.
- Plant your seeds or seedlings (*see tips*)! Try to acquire seedlings where possible so you can immediately use your planter's harvests, but if starting from seed, plant about twice the depth of the seed.
- Fill the reservoir with water making sure that the wicks are touching the water. The wicks will absorb the water upwards and keep soil hydrated. Periodically water the tops of the planter as well if it is looking dry
- Place planters in a window and enjoy! If possible, keep herb planters in the kitchen in an easily accessible place while cooking because that is where you will use it most!

Tips

- Use safety precautions when handling tools
- Add mulch to your container to help further minimize water loss
- Pack the soil tightly, but do not compact too much or the roots will not be able to grow through the soil
- If you do not have the exact materials included in this workshop, experiment with what you do have on hand
- Stick to hardy perennials like mint, rosemary, thyme and oregano because they will be able to grow indoors but still need adequate sunlight. Place in a south-facing window if possible but west-facing windows will also do. Avoid plants like basil because they need full sun and do not do well indoors in the winter

Image sourced through [BlogSpot](#).