

GARDEN ABOVE THE CITY

BALCONY & ROOFTOP GARDENING FOR BEGINNERS

A Practical Guide to Containers, Soil, Watering,
and Starting Your First Small Garden

FREE SAMPLE

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A preview of the full digital edition

Part I: Planning Your Garden

1. Why a Rooftop or Balcony Garden Makes Sense

“Without gardens, buildings and palaces are only crude works of human hands.” — Francis Bacon

Plants are not just decoration. They turn a space into a home. This book grew out of a simple experience: even on a rooftop and an ordinary balcony, you can create a real garden.

Not a perfect garden.

Not a catalog-style garden.

Not a miniature palace park.

A real garden — grown in containers, exposed to sun, wind, rain, drought, and the mistakes every beginner has to make.

You do not need a large garden to start growing your own plants. You do not need a piece of land, a greenhouse, or perfect conditions. Sometimes all you need is a balcony, a rooftop terrace, a few containers, good soil, and the decision to begin.

A small balcony can give you fresh herbs, tomatoes, strawberries, flowers, and a quiet green corner in the middle of everyday life. A rooftop terrace can become more than just an empty space above a building. It can become a garden, an outdoor kitchen, a place to rest, and a small private world where something grows because you planted it there.

I know this is possible because I started my own garden on a rooftop terrace in Gdynia. I did not have a traditional garden. I had a roof, a balcony, strong wind, containers, and a lot of questions.

Step 4: Evaluate Drainage and Runoff

Every container needs proper drainage.

Plants need water, but they do not want to sit in water for too long. Wet, airless soil can damage roots and cause serious problems.

This is why most containers need drainage holes.

But on a balcony or rooftop, drainage is not only about plant health. It is also about where the water goes.

Excess water must flow safely.

Before placing containers, check:

- where the floor drain is,
- whether water can reach it,
- whether water may flow toward the building wall,
- whether water may drip onto a neighbor's balcony,
- whether muddy water could stain the surface,
- whether you need saucers or trays,
- whether containers should stand on pot feet.

Good drainage protects your plants and prevents conflicts.

A balcony garden should not become a waterfall for the person living below you. That is not irrigation. That is a declaration of war.

Use saucers where needed, but do not let plants stand in water for days. Empty excess water after heavy rain if necessary. Raise containers slightly so water can move underneath them. Keep drains clear.

Water must have a path.

Plan that path before the first heavy rain does it for you.

4.5 Construction Tubs

Construction tubs are one of the most practical container solutions I used on my rooftop terrace.

They are usually made for mixing mortar or carrying building materials, not for growing tomatoes, currants, or herbs. But with the right preparation, they can become strong, affordable, large growing containers.

This is one of the biggest lessons from my own garden.

You do not always need expensive garden containers to start.

Sometimes a simple construction tub works better than a decorative pot that costs much more.

Construction tubs are useful because they are:

- strong,
- affordable,
- widely available,
- large enough for many plants,
- easy to modify,
- practical for rooftop and terrace gardening.

I used 80-liter construction tubs because they gave plants enough root space and helped create a simple terrace garden system.

They were not fancy.

They were not romantic.

They were not something you would see in a luxury garden catalog.

But they worked.

And in gardening, “it works” is a beautiful sentence.

4.6 Why 80-Liter Containers Work So Well

An 80-liter container gives a plant much more space than a small pot.

This matters especially for useful plants such as fruit shrubs, tomatoes, peppers, raspberries, grapes, blueberries, and even small fruit trees.

More soil means:

- more root space,
- better water storage,
- more stable temperature,
- less stress during hot days,
- stronger plant growth,
- less frequent watering compared to small pots.

On a rooftop terrace, this can make a big difference. Wind and sun dry containers quickly. A small pot may struggle. A larger tub gives the plant a better chance.

In my terrace garden, 80-liter tubs became the basic system for many plants. They were big enough to grow serious plants, but still simple and affordable.

You can use them for one larger plant, or for a group of smaller plants depending on their needs.

For example:

- one currant bush,
- one gooseberry bush,
- one blueberry bush,
- one tomato with herbs around it,
- several herbs,

5. Soil: The Most Common Beginner Mistake

Soil is one of the most common mistakes in balcony and rooftop gardening.

Beginners often think like this:

“I have a pot. I bought a plant. I need some soil. Any soil will do.”

No, it will not.

In a traditional garden, a plant can send roots deeper and wider. It can search for water, air, nutrients, and better conditions. In a container, the plant lives in a box.

If that box is badly prepared, the plant has nowhere to escape. Too heavy soil, no drainage, wrong pH, poor nutrients, or soil that dries like a brick can quickly turn a healthy plant into a struggling one.

The container is the plant's house.

The soil is its kitchen, water tank, air supply, and storage room. So we need to prepare it properly.



This is why deep, thoughtful watering is usually better than frequent shallow watering.

The goal is to encourage roots to grow down into the container, not to keep them waiting near the surface like guests at a buffet. In hot weather, check daily. In cool weather, check less often. After rain, still check containers. Rain does not always water pots properly, especially if leaves block the soil surface or if containers stand under a roof edge.

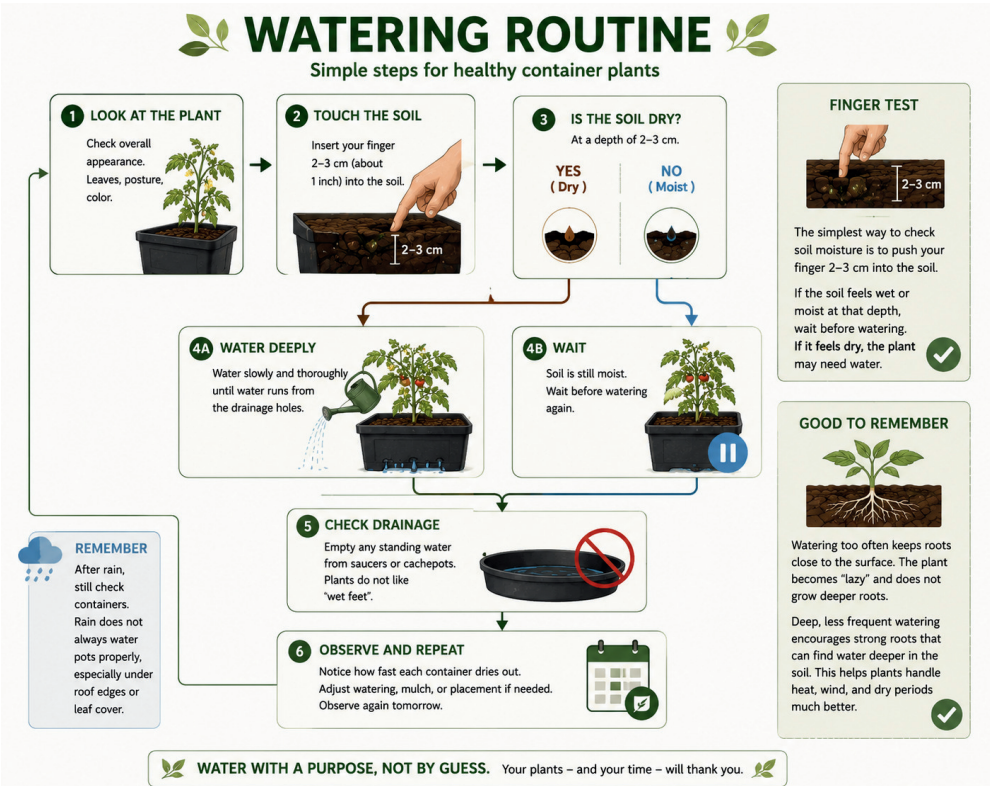
The best watering routine is flexible. It responds to weather, plant size, container size, wind, and season. Watering without guessing means you stop asking:

“Should I water today?”

And start asking:

“What does the soil actually say?”

That small change saves plants.



8.2 Why a Rooftop Is Harder Than a Balcony

A normal balcony can already be challenging. It may be sunny, windy, shaded, narrow, or exposed to reflected heat from walls and windows.

A rooftop is usually more extreme.

There is often more sun, more wind, and less natural shelter.

The air moves faster. Containers dry faster. Plants can lose water even when the soil was moist in the morning. On a hot day, a rooftop can feel like a pan. Plants are not pancakes. They do not enjoy that.

A rooftop garden needs more protection than a garden in the ground because the plants are standing in containers above a hard surface. The floor can heat up. The pots can heat up. The wind can reach the plants from more directions.

Practical example:

If a tomato in the ground needs watering once every few days, the same tomato in a rooftop container may need water every day during hot weather. In a heat wave, it may even need checking twice a day.

This is why large containers are useful on rooftops. A big 80-liter construction tub holds more soil, more moisture, and a more stable root zone than a small pot. It gives the plant a better buffer.

But even a large container needs help during wind and heat.

9.2 Setup 1: Small Balcony Garden

For 2–4 m²

A small balcony can still become a useful and beautiful garden.

You do not need much space. You need smart choices.

For a small balcony, the best first garden is a mix of herbs, leafy greens, strawberries or alpine strawberries, and one or two decorative plants.

Do not start with large fruit bushes or big tomato plants if you only have a narrow space. They can work later, but they may dominate the balcony too quickly.

Best for

- This setup is good for someone who:
- has a small balcony,
- wants a simple first garden,
- likes herbs and fresh leaves,
- does not want heavy containers,
- wants beauty and usefulness together.

Suggested containers

Use:

- 2 balcony boxes,
- 3–5 medium pots,
- 1 small decorative container if there is space.

The balcony boxes can hang on the railing or stand along the edge, depending on safety and building rules. Medium pots can stand near the wall or in a corner.

Avoid tiny pots for thirsty plants. They dry too quickly.

9.8 How to Set Up the Garden in One Weekend

You can start a simple balcony or rooftop garden in one weekend. But do it in the right order.

Friday evening: plan

Measure the space.

Check sun exposure.

Choose your setup.

Make a short shopping list.

Do not go to the garden center without a list unless you enjoy expensive surprises.

Saturday: buy and prepare

Buy containers, soil, mulch, supports, and plants.

Drill drainage holes if needed.

Place containers empty first to test the layout.

Do not fill every container with soil before checking whether the position makes sense. A pot is much easier to move before it becomes a small planet.

Saturday afternoon: plant

Add soil.

Plant calmly.

Water deeply after planting.

Add mulch where suitable.

Install supports for tall plants immediately.

Sunday: observe

Check whether water drains properly.

Check whether any plant is in too much wind or sun.

10.4 Protect New Plants From Strong Sun

Even sun-loving plants may need a short adjustment period after planting. If you plant on a hot day, or if the plant came from a greenhouse, shop, or shaded nursery area, give it some protection for the first few days.

This can be simple:

- move the container to light shade,
- use a temporary shade cloth,
- place taller plants nearby as a screen,
- avoid planting in the middle of a very hot afternoon.

On a roof terrace or balcony, sun can be stronger than it feels at ground level. Containers heat up quickly, and young plants may lose water faster than their roots can replace it.

After a few days, gradually expose the plant to more sun.

10.5 Protect Young Plants From Wind

Wind is one of the silent problems of balcony and roof gardening.

It dries the soil, bends stems, damages leaves, and can make young plants struggle before they even start.

In the first weeks, give young plants some support if needed.

Use:

- bamboo sticks,
- small plant supports,
- wind screens,
- heavier containers,
- grouping plants together.

Do not wait until the plant is lying sideways like it has given up on life. A simple support at the right moment is better than a rescue mission later.

Ready to Start Your Own Garden?

You've seen just a small part of what's inside.

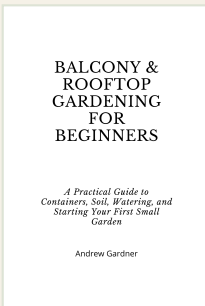
The full digital edition of

Balcony & Rooftop Gardening for Beginners

takes you step by step from an empty balcony or rooftop to a practical container garden you can actually manage.

Inside the full book:

- ✓ Choosing the right location
- ✓ Containers and 80-liter construction tubs
- ✓ Soil and drainage
- ✓ Watering and feeding
- ✓ Wind, heat, and plant protection
- ✓ Ready-to-use balcony and rooftop setups
- ✓ Your first 30 days after planting
- ✓ Common beginner mistakes - and how to avoid them



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