



# Women in Agriculture

## Training manual for female extension educators

# Quick Guide – Sterilizing Containers



### Overview

Sterilizing will help remove and kill plant pathogens and human pathogens in containers used for growing food. This will reduce the chance of having disease problems in the garden

### Selecting a container:

- It's ok to re-use plastic buckets and other plastic containers that contained food products.
- Avoid plastic containers that held petroleum products, chemicals, or manure.
- All containers should have holes or slats in the bottom to allow water to drain out.
- Dark colors will create higher temperatures in the summer that could injure young tender roots and prevent the full development of a plant's root system; however for early spring germination this can be helpful.
- Containers made from porous materials (clay, ceramic, concrete, and wood) will dry out more quickly than plastic or metal containers.

### Preparing the container:

1. Clean containers before and after using them for food gardening. Remove plant and soil

residues by hand and rinse them out with water if possible.

2. Make a weak bleach solution of **9 parts water to 1 part bleach** (sodium hypochlorite)
3. Submerge small pots in bleach solution for 10 minutes
4. Disinfect larger containers by filling a plastic spray container with the weak bleach solution and spraying the inside and outside of the containers.
5. Rinse pots with clean water and allow them to dry before using or storing.
6. Wear protective rubber or plastic gloves when cleaning and disinfecting containers.

Acceptable commercial disinfectant products are available that contain one of the following active ingredients: **hydrogen dioxide, hydrogen peroxide, or quaternary ammonium**. Always follow label directions

**Parts of this factsheet are adapted from  
University of Maryland Extension, Home and  
Garden Information Center  
<http://extension.umd.edu/hgic>**

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