



Garden Tower 2 Set-up and Growing Guide

Getting Started with your Garden Tower 2:

Decide on a location for your GT2. Outdoor towers should be placed in a sunny spot. Choose a firm, flat surface where the feet will not sink into the ground. If you will be growing indoors, keep in mind that occasionally some water and soil may end up on the floor. Your plants will need plenty of light. Most indoor towers will require grow lights. The Earth Connections team can help you choose the right lighting set-up for your specific situation.

Choose a soil. A light-weight grower's mix or potting soil works well. You can ask at your local greenhouse or plant nursery for a fluffy soil mix meant for container growing. A good soil will balance drainage, water retention, and aeration for both plants and the compost. Indoor towers may benefit from a soil with higher drainage, as it will not dry out as quickly and the ability to cycle nutrients through with the water is a key part of the GT system.

We highly recommend adding a soil amendment of some type. Soil amendments are anything that adds nutrition needed for plants to thrive. This is especially important in new set-ups until the compost column has some time to start producing, if your compost output is low, or you choose not to compost.

Soil amendment options:

- Liquid organic plant food mixtures will provide the most available nutrition for young plants but have to be re-applied every so often.
- Granular types are slow-release and will provide nutrients for a longer period. Evolve All-Purpose 4-4-4 is a great option to mix into the soil of each layer when you initially set up and fill your tower.
- We recommend staying away from animal manure products as they have an overabundance of salts.
- The best fertilizers contain NO DPW (Dehydrated Poultry Waste), Municipal sludge (labeled as Bio-Solids), or petrochemically derived fertilizers (salts).
- Follow the directions on the label of whatever type of plant nutrition you choose carefully, as they will provide the most benefit to your plants when used at the proper dilution and frequency.

Setting Up Your Garden Tower:

There are instructions included in the box with your Garden Tower with detailed information on how to set-up and fill the tower. We recommend building your tower in thirds, two rings and two compost column sections at a time. At each level, cover the compost column with its lid and add soil, amendments, and water. The amount of water needed will vary based on the amount water your chosen soil can hold. You should water each layer until water begins to drip into the drawer to help settle the soil. Be sure to check the drawer frequently to avoid over-flow, as quite a bit of water will run through especially if your soil is very dry. You can re-use the water from the drawer on the next level. Once your GT2 is built and filled, you can add red wiggler worms and begin composting. See “Vermicomposting in the GT2” for more information. It is also beneficial to add some soil- dwelling worms (earthworms) to help with keeping the soil aerated.

Adding Plants:

Choose plants that will thrive in your conditions and climate, but most importantly grow what you would like to eat! Look for “bush varieties” and compact types of your favourite veggies, which are smaller and great for container growing. While almost anything can grow in your GT, some options can present unique challenges. Very large plants can overshadow others, but can be great on the top of the tower. If you do plant larger varieties in the pockets, you may choose to place shade loving veggies below them or strategically leave some pockets empty. Plants which produce long trailing vines can make it difficult to rotate your tower. Set ups which include vining varieties usually have them placed lower in the tower, and forgo rotating in favour of planting full sun plants on the opposite side of those that tolerate shade. Some plants, such as strawberries and mint, become very woody and send out a lot of runners often invading other pockets of the tower. If you choose to add these types of plants there may be extra work required to keep them contained. Different types of plants will have specific needs in terms of soil nutrients, soil moisture level, and light requirements. A little research can go a long way towards success in gardening. If you are a new gardener, you may want to start with just a few different easy-to-grow veggies. Local greenhouses are a great source of information that will be specific to your area, and don’t hesitate to contact the Earth Connections team if you need a little help selecting plants.

You can either start your plants from seeds or purchase seedlings. If you are beginning with seeds, you will have the best results if you start them in a tray. Seeds and tiny seedlings need consistent moisture levels and very close proximity to their light source. Your grow-lights should be no more than two inches above the tops of the plants. This will prevent them from stretching towards the light and instead encourage short, strong stems leading to stronger plants as they mature. For more information on starting seeds, check out the resource called “Seed Starting For Successful Growing” .

Planting your Garden Tower:

- Keep a container nearby for soil removed to make room for roots.
- Reduce mess by placing a tarp under the section you are planting to catch spills.
- As you water-in your seedlings, keep an eye on the drawer to avoid overflowing.
- Consider placing plants that require less space between those requiring more.
- Adding identical plants or those with similar light requirements in small clusters or diagonal rows is a good strategy.
- If your tower is outdoors, pay attention to how long your varieties will take to reach maturity and follow the recommended planting times.

Maintaining your GT2:

It can be helpful to set up a regular watering schedule. For outdoor Towers, morning watering is ideal and you should avoid getting your plants wet during the hottest part of the day. We recommend watering with a container instead of a hose in order to learn the ideal amount of water for your Tower. A general guideline is to add 4-6 gallons of water every 2-3 days. The amount will vary based on your soil, the heat and humidity of your Tower's location, the types of plants, and their level of maturity.

Test the soil for dryness by placing a finger in a pocket in the lowest row. If the soil feels dry, a heavier watering is required (5-7 gallons). If the soil feels slightly moist, maintenance watering is all that is required (2-4) gallons. A layer of mulch on the top surface of the tower can help maintain constant moisture.

Tend to your garden as you would with a regular garden, remove dead or damaged leaves, cut back unruly growth, and replace harvested plants.

If your plants are not thriving, the problem can usually be traced to one of these common issues:

- Over or under watering
- Not enough light, grow-lights on for too few (or more rarely, too many) hours, or light source too far away
- Lack of nutrition in the soil
- Nutrition not distributed evenly, usually indicating not enough water cycling.
- Temperatures too warm or too cold for certain types of plant

Garden Towers in cooler weather:

The Garden Tower can have an extended growing season because of the large thermal mass presented by the volume of soil in the tower. Depending on the cold tolerance of your chosen plants, you may be able to plant earlier in the spring and keep your tower going farther into the fall. Remember to protect your plants from frost by covering them.

As winter approaches, you can either move your GT to a warm location and keep growing or leave it out and replant in the spring. Keep in mind that moving an outdoor tower in may bring some pests along with it requiring treatment. You may prefer to replant with new seedlings for the indoor growing season.

If you choose to leave your GT outside over winter, make sure to allow time for soil to dry before freezing. Flip the water drawer upside down to prevent damage from ice build-up.

Your worms will not survive outside once temperatures are consistently below zero. You can release them into the garden and add new worms in the spring, or remove them from the column and place them into an indoor worm bin to compost indoors until spring.

The Earth Connections Team is committed to helping you succeed. Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions, we are always ready to help.

Happy Growing!