# *BALCONY FOOD FACTORY*

## ~~ Turn Your Balcony Into A Productive Food Garden By Maximizing Time, Space & Soil ~~

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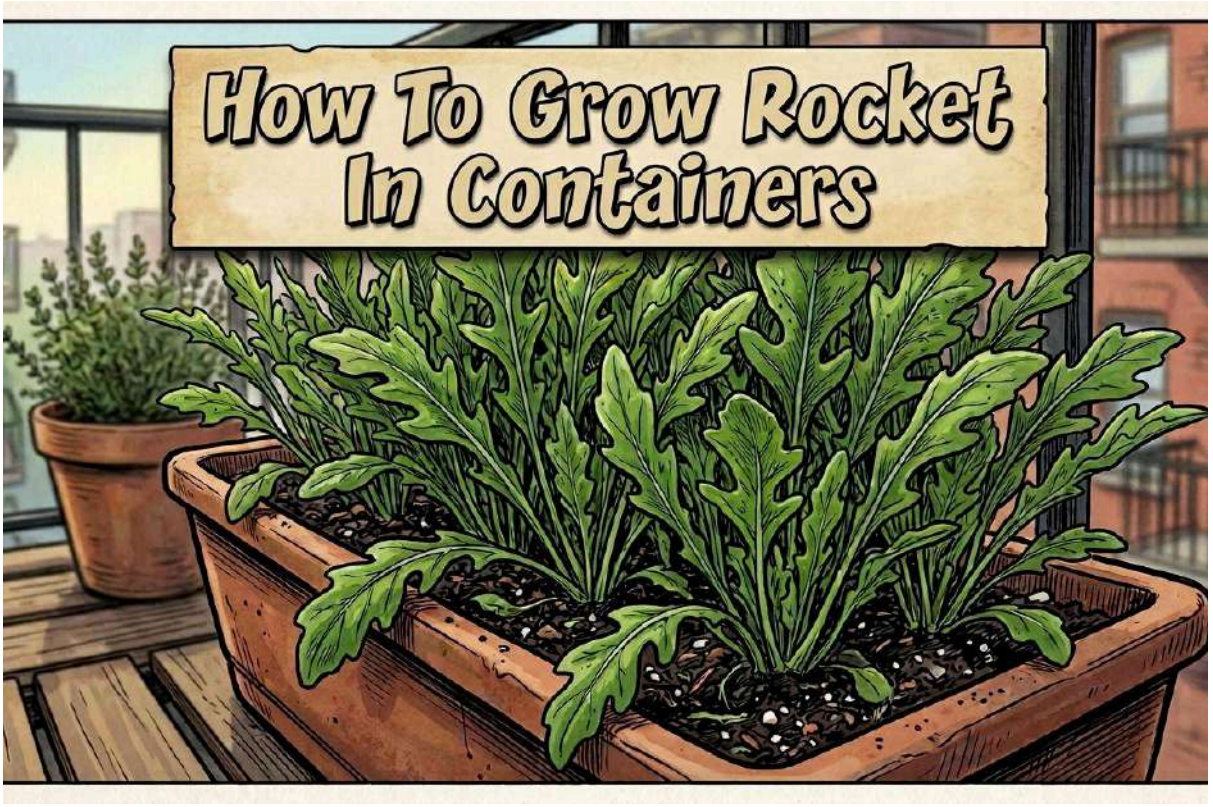
And now, here's your Growing Guide for Rocket:

# How To Grow Rocket In Containers




## by JIM BOERE

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Rocket (Arugula) is one of the easiest leafy greens to grow in containers, and one of the quickest to reward you with something fresh to harvest. Its peppery leaves add character to salads, sandwiches, pasta, and plenty of other dishes. And you don’t need a large pot, a garden, or much experience to grow a useful supply.

Rocket is more than an easy crop to grow. It is also a good example of how to get more food from a limited growing space. By combining repeat sowing with regular harvesting, you can keep your containers productive for much longer than a single sowing might suggest.

In this guide, we'll look at **how to grow rocket in containers using the principles of the Multi-Harvest Container System**, from choosing a suitable pot to harvesting leaves and planning your next sowing.

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# 1. Rocket At A Glance

Rocket, also known as arugula in North America, is a fast-growing leafy green with a distinctive peppery flavor. It is particularly well suited to container growing because it needs relatively little space and can be sown directly where it will grow.

| Growing Detail | What You Need To Know |
|---|---|
| Botanical Name | *Eruca vesicaria* (also commonly listed as *Eruca sativa*) |
| Growing Season | Spring through early fall, depending on your climate |
| Light | Full sun to partial shade |
| Sowing Method | Direct sowing into the container |
| Recommended Container Depth | About 6 inches (15 cm) |
| Watering | Keep the potting mix consistently lightly moist |
| Feeding | Modest feeding is usually sufficient |
| Germination | Often around 5–10 days under suitable conditions |
| Time To First Harvest | Often around 3–5 weeks, depending on conditions and variety |
| Harvesting Method | Pick individual leaves or cut a portion of the plant |
| Multi-Harvest Potential | Repeat sowing and repeated leaf harvesting |
| Main Challenge | Warm weather and dry conditions can encourage premature flowering (bolting) |

*These are general guidelines rather than fixed rules. Variety, temperature, light, and growing conditions all influence how quickly rocket develops and how long it remains productive.*

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# 2. Choosing The Right Container

Rocket doesn’t need a particularly deep container. A pot or planter with a depth of approximately 6 inches (15 cm) is generally sufficient, provided it has adequate drainage.

The width of the container is more important if you want to harvest enough leaves for regular meals. A wider planter gives you room to sow a useful patch of rocket rather than relying on just a few plants.

Make sure your container has drainage holes. Rocket appreciates consistently moist potting mix, but its roots should not sit in waterlogged conditions.

Fill the container with a good-quality potting mix that retains moisture while allowing excess water to drain. If you’re reusing a container that previously held another crop, check that the remaining mix is still in good condition and refresh and replenish it as necessary.

You don’t need a separate container for every crop. In fact, making productive use of the containers you already have is an important part of the Multi-Harvest Container System.

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# 3. When And Where To Sow Rocket

Rocket grows best in relatively cool conditions. You can sow it in spring and continue making sowings through much of the growing season, with the exact timing depending on your local climate.

In many temperate climates, sowing from spring into early fall works well.

**During the hottest part of summer**, however, rocket may grow less comfortably, develop a stronger flavor, or begin flowering before you have had much time to harvest it.

## Sow Directly Into The Container

Rocket is best sown directly into its growing container. This avoids the extra work of raising seedlings and transplanting them later.

1. Fill your container with moist potting mix.
2. Sow the seeds thinly across the surface or in shallow rows.
3. Cover them lightly with potting mix, following the seed packet's depth recommendation.
4. Water gently so the seeds remain in place.
5. Keep the surface consistently moist while the seeds germinate.

Once the seedlings have developed, thin them if necessary to give the plants enough room to grow. You can eat the thinnings rather than letting them go to waste.

**Rocket usually germinates quite quickly** in suitable conditions. Within a few weeks, you should have leaves large enough to begin harvesting, although growth rates vary with temperature and variety.

## Choose A Suitable Position

Rocket grows in full sun or partial shade. In spring and fall, a sunny position generally works well. When temperatures rise, some afternoon shade can help reduce heat stress and slow the tendency to bolt.

On a balcony, remember that containers can warm up and dry out faster than garden soil. A position that receives some protection from the strongest afternoon sun can therefore be useful during hot weather.

In summer I often position my rocket behind a bigger pot with a bigger crop (my tomatoes for example), so that it may catch some of the morning sun, but is mostly in the shade during afternoons.

One of the advantages of container gardening is the ability to move them around, so use that if you can.

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# 4. Growing Rocket With The Multi-Harvest Container System

The Multi-Harvest Container System is about getting more from the space, containers, and growing season you already have. Rather than treating each sowing as a one-time crop, you combine repeated harvesting, succession planting, and sensible use of container space.

Rocket is particularly suitable for this approach because it grows quickly and can provide leaves over multiple harvests.

## 1. Keep Your Container Productive With Succession Sowing

One sowing of rocket will not provide the same quality and quantity of leaves indefinitely. Plants mature, temperatures change, and flowering eventually becomes more likely.

**Instead of sowing all your rocket at once, make smaller sowings at intervals**.

For example, you might sow one container, then make another sowing a couple of weeks later. As the first batch becomes ready to harvest, the second

is developing. You can continue this process while conditions remain favorable for growth.

**The interval doesn't need to be rigid**. In cool conditions, growth may be slow, while warm weather can accelerate development and flowering. Observe how your plants are growing and adjust your next sowing accordingly.

This is succession planting in a simple, practical form. It spreads your harvest over time and reduces the chance of having too much rocket ready at once, followed by a gap with nothing to pick.

## 2. Harvest More Than Once From The Same Plants

Rocket isn't necessarily a crop you need to pull out as soon as you have harvested a few leaves.

Once the plants have developed a good amount of foliage, pick the larger outer leaves and leave the smaller central leaves to continue growing. Avoid removing so much foliage that the plants have little left to support further growth.

You can also cut a portion of the foliage from a well-established patch, leaving the growing points intact where possible.

The plants may then **produce more leaves for subsequent harvests**. How many harvests you get depends on the growing conditions, the variety, and how the plants respond to cutting.

Eventually, the leaves may become tougher or more strongly flavored, and the plants may start to flower. That's when it makes sense to harvest what remains and replace the crop.

## 3. Make The Most Of Every Container

A container that has finished producing one crop doesn’t have to remain empty for the rest of the season.

Because rocket grows quickly, it can be a useful crop to fit into gaps between slower-growing vegetables. You might grow it while another crop is still developing, provided both plants have enough room, light, water, and nutrients.

You can also use a container that has become available after harvesting another short-lived crop.

The important point is not to squeeze as many plants as possible into every pot. It is to keep suitable containers producing food across the season without creating unnecessary competition or extra maintenance.

## 4. Match The Crop To The Season

Rocket is most productive when you grow it during conditions that it loves.

**Cooler spring and fall weather often provides a longer harvesting window**. During hot spells, plants may bolt quickly, leaving you with less time to harvest leaves.

Rather than repeatedly sowing large quantities into unsuitable conditions, adjust the timing and amount of each sowing. A smaller sowing in partial shade may be more useful than a large patch that flowers before you can use it.

This is another part of the Multi-Harvest Container System: the goal is a steady supply of useful food, not simply a large number of plants.

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# 5. Watering And Feeding

Rocket is relatively undemanding, but consistent watering makes a noticeable difference to the quality and taste of the leaves.

## Watering

Keep the potting mix lightly and consistently moist. Don’t allow the container to dry out completely, especially while seedlings are establishing or during warm, windy weather.

Dry conditions can make rocket more pungent and may encourage premature flowering. At the same time, avoid keeping the mix saturated.

**Check the container rather than relying on a fixed watering schedule**. Small pots and exposed balcony containers may need water more frequently than larger planters in sheltered positions.

## Feeding

Rocket generally has modest nutritional requirements compared with heavy-feeding fruiting crops.

Start with a good-quality potting mix. If you’re reusing the mix for another sowing, assess its condition and replenish it where appropriate with mature compost or a suitable fertilizer.

A light application of a balanced liquid fertilizer may help if the plants are growing in depleted potting mix, but heavy feeding is rarely necessary for a short-lived leafy crop like rocket.

The aim is healthy, steady leaf growth, not excessive foliage production at the expense of good growing conditions.

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# 6. Harvesting Rocket For A Continuous Supply

You can usually begin harvesting rocket when the leaves are large enough to use, often within three to five weeks of sowing under favorable conditions.

There are two straightforward ways to harvest it.

**Pick Individual Leaves:** Remove the larger outer leaves as you need them, leaving the younger central growth to develop. This is a good approach when you want small amounts of fresh rocket regularly.

**Cut A Portion Of The Foliage:** If you have a dense patch, you can cut some of the leaves together while leaving the growing points intact where possible. This can make harvesting quicker, although regrowth will depend on the plants' condition and how they respond to cutting.

Harvest regularly rather than allowing the leaves to become overgrown. Young leaves are generally tender and mild, while older leaves often have a stronger flavor.

For the **Multi-Harvest Container System**, the most useful combination is to harvest established plants repeatedly while raising the next batch through succession sowing. This gives you more control over the timing and quantity of your harvest.

**Rocket flowers are edible, too**. If plants begin flowering, you can enjoy the flowers rather than automatically treating them as waste.

However, flowering does signal that the main leaf-harvesting period is drawing to a close.

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# 7. I Tried Growing Rocket Through Winter And This Is What Happened

I love having fresh vegetables and herbs to harvest from my balcony year-round. Not always in the same peak-season quantities, of course, but I like there to be something to harvest always. To use in my daily cooking.

Possibilities depend on your climate and growing conditions, but I always look for ways to extend my growing season. I experiment.

Experimenting in the garden is part of the fun, if you ask me. And never wasted time or effort.

**If one experiment fails, you've still learned something useful**.

**In other cases you may discover that more is possible on your balcony than you might have thought**.

I was pleasently surprised when I tried growing rocket later in the year than usual.

***It is important to note*** *that these next results are from one balcony, during one winter, in one year. Your timings may need to be different, your results*

*may be different, and it may not even be an option at all to try this where you live. I'm just sharing what happened on my south-facing balcony in Schiedam, The Netherlands, where we have a cool, maritime temperate (American Zone 8b-type) climate. It might show: you don't know until you try.*

## Rocket Sowing In September

It was September and a large container became available after a summer crop had finished. Knowing that rocket does well in spring and autumn, when it's not so hot, I decided to do one last sowing in this pot.

I was confident I would get a harvest: the still warm weather and potting mix would help with quick germination and early growth, and there was still time for the plants to mature.

I did not know how far into winter the rocket would last.

## Rocket Autumn Growth

As expected, germination in September was no problem and initial growth was strong.

I let the plants establish during October, and in November I was able to start taking small harvests.

## Rocket Through Winter

I continued harvesting December – February.

New growth slowed down, but I had a big container full of rocket by now, so I took what I needed and made sure I kept an eye on moisture levels.

**Winter conditions were not a problem for the rocket**. Our winters are not crazy cold but we do get cold spells with frost and snow. The rocket was fine.

I did not give it extra protection like fleece or anything either.

## Flowering Rocket In March

Come spring the rocket quickly went into flowering mode (bolting).

This pretty much marked the end of harvesting leaves, as in this stage the taste rapidly deteriorates. But did you know the flowers of rocket are adible as well? So there is that.

I left the rocket to flower and attract some flying friends to the balcony garden for a while.

Then it was time for its next job in the garden.

## Rocket Turns Mulch In April

In April I finally removed the rocket from the pot.

The roots went into the compost bin. The stems I cut into pieces and used as a mulch to cover the potting mix in a container that was sitting empty until a tomato plant could go in in May. *

**In May** that mulch went into the compost bin as well.

I don’t waste anything I don’t have to.

**The next year** the compost helped to refresh my potting mix.

**Full circle**.

One growing cycle can connect to the next.

Each container is part of an ongoing growing system.

Only diseased plant material needs to be removed from the system as waste. **

* **Be mindful** of what you use as mulch or add to your compost system.

If a plant has already set seed and you don't want that seed to spread to other containers, don't use it as mulch and don't add it to your compost bin.

**–> Be careful also:** not all crops are suitable for use as a mulch. Some can spread disease, smell and attract unwanted wildlife, or quickly mold. We don't want any of that in our gardens.

I've made a list of suitable and unsuitable crops for you. Use the button to download it.
**Download The List As A PDF**

** **As a general rule**, especially for beginner gardeners, I would advise to always remove diseased material from the garden. I wouldn't even try to compost it; just get rid of it, play it safe.

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# 8. Common Problems When Growing Rocket

Rocket is generally straightforward to grow, but a few issues can interfere with your harvest.

## Premature Flowering

Warm temperatures, long days, and dry conditions can encourage rocket to bolt, meaning the plant produces a flower stalk earlier than you'd like.

Try sowing during cooler periods, providing some afternoon shade when necessary, and maintaining consistent moisture. Succession sowing also helps because you won't be relying on one batch to supply leaves for the entire season.

**Once a plant has bolted**, its leaves may become more strongly flavored. You can harvest what remains, enjoy the flowers, and start another batch when conditions are suitable.

## Flea Beetles

Small holes in rocket leaves can be a sign of flea beetle damage. These tiny beetles can be particularly troublesome in warm, dry conditions.

Keep young plants growing steadily, avoid allowing the potting mix to become excessively dry, and inspect the leaves regularly. Fine insect mesh can help protect plants where flea beetles are a persistent problem, provided it is installed so that pests aren't trapped underneath.

## Aphids

Aphids sometimes gather on tender growth. Check the growing points and undersides of leaves, particularly when the plants are stressed or growing slowly.

For a small container crop, you can often remove affected leaves or dislodge aphids with a gentle stream of water. Inspect the plants again to see whether the problem is returning.

## Poor Germination Or Slow Growth

Rocket usually germinates readily, but very dry potting mix, unsuitable temperatures, or old seed can cause disappointing results.

Keep the potting mix moist during germination and use seed that has been stored properly. If the seedlings emerge unevenly, thin them as needed and avoid allowing faster-growing plants to crowd out the rest.

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# 9. Growing Rocket With Other Crops

Rocket can share growing space with other crops when their requirements and growth habits are compatible.

**Lettuce** is a natural option because both crops are leafy greens and can be harvested repeatedly.

**Radishes** can also fit into a mixed planting because they mature quickly.

**Green onions** may be another useful companion, provided the container has enough room for all the plants to develop.

However, companion planting doesn’t mean that every combination will automatically improve growth or protect plants from pests. The most important considerations are whether the crops have compatible light and water needs and whether they have sufficient room.

**Avoid overcrowding**. Several crops competing for the same small volume of potting mix can become more work to maintain and may produce less than a simpler planting.

If you want to try a mixed container, start with a modest combination and observe how it performs.

The aim is to make better use of your space, not to fill every available gap regardless of the consequences.

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# 10. Frequently Asked Questions

## Can You Grow Rocket In A Small Pot?

Yes. A container around 6 inches (15 cm) deep can be sufficient. A wider pot or planter gives you more room to grow a useful patch and makes repeated harvesting easier.

## How Often Should You Sow Rocket?

There is no single interval that works in every climate. Making smaller sowings every couple of weeks is a reasonable starting point during suitable growing conditions. Adjust the timing based on temperature, growth rate, and how quickly you use the leaves.

## Does Rocket Grow Back After Harvesting?

It can. Picking the outer leaves while leaving the growing points intact allows established plants to produce additional foliage. Regrowth is not guaranteed, however, and eventually the plants will become less productive or begin flowering.

## Can You Grow Rocket In Partial Shade?

Yes. Rocket tolerates partial shade, which can be particularly useful during warm weather. It still needs enough light to grow well, so avoid positions that remain heavily shaded throughout the day.

## Can You Grow Rocket Indoors?

Rocket can grow indoors if it receives sufficient light and has suitable growing conditions. However, a bright outdoor container is often simpler for balcony gardeners. Indoor growing may require supplemental lighting, especially during darker months.

## Is Rocket A Good Crop For Beginners?

Absolutely. It germinates quickly, can be sown directly into its final container, and doesn’t require a deep pot or complicated care routine. Its fast growth also makes it a useful crop for learning how succession planting and repeated harvesting work in practice.

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# 11. Final Thoughts

Rocket is a small crop that can make a useful contribution to a container garden. It is a staple crop in mine.

It doesn’t require much space, it grows relatively quickly, and you can harvest individual leaves rather than treating the entire plant as a one-time crop.

The key is to combine repeated harvesting with succession sowing. Let established plants provide leaves while the next batch develops, and adjust your sowing schedule to suit the season.

**This is the Multi-Harvest Container System in a simple, accessible form:** use your containers thoughtfully, harvest what you grow, and plan ahead so that your growing space keeps producing food.

You don’t need dozens of containers or a complicated planting plan to get started. One suitable pot of rocket, followed by a second sowing when the time is right, is enough to put these principles into practice.

# About Me

I’m Jim, the gardener behind Balcony Food Factory.

I’ve been growing food for decades, from allotments to my current 10th-floor balcony, where I’ve learned how to grow a surprising amount of food in a surprisingly small space.

Balcony Food Factory is where I share what I’ve learned about growing more food in containers, making the most of limited space, and keeping things practical and manageable.

Have any questions? Anything I can help you with? I would love to hear from you!

Email me: info@balconyfoodfactory.com

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**My New Book is out!**

# The Multi-Harvest Container System Starter Guide

