**Harvest Containers**

Molly Shaw, CCE South Central NY Ag Team

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The containers used to hold harvested crops certainly affect the efficiency of the harvest. Most farms agree that it’s best to have uniform containers because organization is simplified, and containers that nest one inside another are favored because they take less storage space. When utility, price and longevity are considered, there isn’t one single container that is best for every farm or crop, and farms can be quite creative with the containers they use to hold harvested crops.

What follows is simply a “show and tell” of containers we saw used on vegetable farms this summer, with a brief listing of their pros and cons.

**Repurposed containers:**

5 gallon buckets, ~1/2 bushel, $5

Sometimes available for free

Handles allow lifting of loads without excessive stooping

Durable

No lids (usually)

No drainage holes

Nesting

Laundry baskets, ~ 2 bushel, “hip hugger design”, $12

Possible to carry against the hip with one hand

Durable

No lid

Side vents, but no bottom drain holes

Nesting

Home storage boxes, ~1.5 bushel, $10-12

Durability varies by brand; some can be brittle. “Roughneck” is reported to be among the most rugged

Has lid

Stacking (with lid)/nesting

No vents or drainage

55 gallon food grade barrel, cut in half with handles attached, ~3 bushels, $5-10 + labor

Durable

No lid

No vents or drainage

Nesting

Labor required to cut barrels and add handles

Rounded bottom easy to drag in field as you harvest

**Produce Harvest containers:**

Grape (fruit) lugs, ~1 bushel; $13, Belle Terre Produce

Very durable, polyethylene

Available with or without ventilation holes

No lid

Nesting/stacking

Apple picking bag/bucket, ¾-1 bushel (straps onto body); $32-80,

Leaves both hands free for harvesting

Transfers weight to shoulders when standing

Bottom opens to gently dump produce

General purpose 1.75 bushel rectangular plastic container; $15 Nolts Produce Supply

Very durable, polyethylene

Vented bottoms and sides

No lid

Nesting/stacking

Attached lid plastic shipping container (~1 bushel); $12-15 Global Industries

Very durable, polyethylene

Lids attached

Nesting/stacking

No ventilation/drainage holes

Available in different colors

Fruit/veg crates, ~1 bushel (also available with shorter sides); $10 Belle Terre Produce

(Also known as bulb shipping crates)

Polyethylene, but not as durable as other containers, 25 lb limit

Lids available, $2.50 extra

Stacking, but not nesting

Vented bottoms and sides

Different containers end up being ideal for different farms. Consider the following when making your choice:

* Many farms use the same type of container for harvest as they do for storage and transportation to markets.
* Often having drainage holes in a storage bin is important to get rid of excess wash water, where drainage in a harvest container isn’t as critical.
* Having a lid when harvesting and storing tender crops like greens can help prevent them from drying out.
* Consider the container size, especially when harvesting heavy crops like carrots and cucumbers. Sometimes smaller is better.
* Sometimes farmers can find repurposed containers locally for cheap or free

Note: Brands and suppliers are listed as examples only. Cornell Cooperative Extension doesn’t endorse one brand or supplier over another.

5 gallon food-grade buckets



Laundry baskets



Home storage boxes



Repurposed 55 gallon food-grade drums



Shipping containers with attached lids along side smaller fruit lugs used for heavy crops.

Apple picking bag/bucket



General purpose 1.75 bushel plastic container



Fruit/veg crates, often known as “bulb crates”

