

Whiskey barrel recipe:

Needed:

*1 whiskey barrel with holes drilled in the bottom and between the first and second bands at the bottom of the barrel. Barrels are designed to hold water and MUST have adequate drainage!!!

*1/3 volume tested loam – amend with calcium and other missing elements to a rough working range

*1/3 volume commercial potting mix with either peat moss or coconut fiber. If you're using your own compost make sure that it is based largely on broken down leaves otherwise it will be way too heavy for a container. It's stunningly easy to compact a large container and lose the value of the container's controlled growing environment and is the most common mistake made.

*1/3 volume bark chip or decayed wood chip or other aerating material like biochar or growstones (<https://growstone.com/the-data/faq/>). Biochar and growstones are permanent, decayed wood chip and bark chip are going to break down through time and lead to compaction if not replaced.

*organic fertilizer like NCO Pro-gro <http://norganics.com/index-12/index-11/fertilizers/progro/>, (2) alfalfa meal (2), azomite <http://www.azomite.com/faq.html> (1) or other paramagnetic rock and calcium (1/2) (usually a mix of calcite, dolomite and gypsum) blended together and applied at a shovel full (8-10 cups) per barrel. () indicates proportions as cups or bags.

Mix all of the above together on a tarp for thorough integration and fill up the barrel. Water in lightly (don't drown it!!) and let it sit for at least a couple of weeks to allow the microbes to wake up and calm down and then plant. If planting veggies then less is more. If planting flowers then more is more pleasing. Both will need the same level of care as the season progresses...

A note: for future years there is no need to empty the barrel. For the first two –three years you can apply a shovel full of the mineral mix to the top of the barrel and rototill it in as far as you can go. I use a Mantis tiller – excellent tool for this purpose – can also use a shovel and potato hook. After the third year or so, you will have to add a mix of potting soil and aerating material (if wood chip) and work it through the barrel to the bottom – I usually empty half the barrel onto a tarp –add have the mix, work it in and repeat.

Once planted, the barrel will run along smoothly for about 6 weeks or so and then you'll need to step in with additional support if you want the best the plants can produce (veggies or flowers). I usually start liquid fertilizer the 2nd week of July, again at the end of July and ramp up to once a week by mid-August until the frost takes the plants. Use this schedule for any kind of annual plants – not for perennials!!

Use a combination of liquid fish, humates, yucca, molasses, kelp and microbes. As the season deepens and the plants may need more than the organics can provide, substitute a high Mg chemical fertilizer for the fish and leave the rest of the buffering agents in place. It's possible to keep excellent production of fruits and flowers through about 30 degrees and sometimes a bit lower (this year November 5th in Central Mass without cover).