

Container Gardening

THE BASICS

CONTAINERS

- Larger are better than smaller, at least 12" wide and 12" deep (any smaller and they need to be watered constantly).
- Be sure they're clean and free of disease
- Must have good drainage.

Growing Medium

- Must drain well.
- Be lightweight – helps for good root growth
- Must be sterilized to avoid insects, diseases and weed seeds.
- Don't use garden soil. It doesn't drain fast enough.

Soilless potting mixes are quite good and the easiest way to go. Many of the new ones contain wetting agents, nutrients, and peat moss.

PLANTING METHOD

- Mix slow-release fertilizer such as Osmocote into potting mix.
- Mix polymer "Soil Moist" into lower half of potting mix.
- Fill container about $\frac{3}{4}$ full of the mix
- Pre-arrange your chosen plants to be sure you like the grouping and placement.
- Starting in the center, remove the plant from its pot, gently loosen and spread roots. Plant closely (more closely than you'd plant in the ground).
- Add more potting mix to within one inch of the top.
- Water thoroughly.

MAINTENANCE

FERTILIZING

Frequent watering washes out nutrients, so you need to provide a constant supply of nutrients. For annuals especially, supplement with water –soluble every two weeks. Alternatively, you can add a weak solution of fertilizer each time you water.

GROOMING

Remove spent blossoms and brown leaves. Removing spent blooms encourages strong growth and continued heavy flowering. Check for insects and disease.

WATERING

- Check for need to water every other day, and every day in hot weather.
- Don't just use your eyes – stick your finger into the soil! If soil is dry down to 1", then you need to water.
- The best time to water is early in the morning. If you must water in hot, sunny weather, avoid splashing the leaves, which can scorch.
- Water thoroughly, but never allow water to stand in saucers or drip trays, Consider using feet for your containers – they help with drainage and protect your deck or patio.
- Consider adding the gels/polymers that hold water for later release, but don't depend on them entirely. Remember that if the container has dried out too much before watering, the polymer can actually pull water out of the roots of the plants. And follow the manufacturers directions exactly. A very little goes a long way!

FILLING CONTAINERS

- Make sure all the plants you choose for a container have the same cultivation needs and the container is placed in an area where the plants get their cultivation needs met. Remember you can arrange many pots containing one or a few plants to make an attractive display.
- When designing a pot, keep in mind complementing colors, texture, and heights.
- Texture has two aspects: Shape and surface. Shape would be the outline of the leaf or flower such as if it is jagged or lacy. Surface would include the up close look of the leaf or flower such as if it is shiny, fuzzy, ribbed or matte.
- When combining plant materials, consider a mix of uprights, trailers and fillers.
- Flowers are wonderful, but keep in mind foliage, especially when using perennials. When the flowers fade you won't be disappointed.
- When choosing plants remember some plants are more aggressive than others. These aggressive plants can sometimes overtake weaker plants. Keep aggressive plants under control by cutting them back. This keeps them neat and limits their growth.
- Remember many types of plants can be used in containers such as annuals, perennials, ornamental grasses, herbs, and vegetables. Mix and match to get the look you want.

- Use herbs to add fragrance to your container. Thyme, creeping oregano, creeping rosemary, and chamomile are all herbs to use as a trailing plant. Other herbs such as lavender, mint, sage can be used to give height to a container.

Upright examples of Plants:

- Cannas
- Grasses
- Ferns

Trailer examples of Plants:

- Ivy
- Clematis
- Vinca
- Sweet potato vine
- Licorice plant
- Trailing verbena
- Alyssum

Filler examples of Plants:

- Petunias
- Impatiens
- Geraniums
- Begonias
- Lobelia
- Dahlias
- Dianthus
- Snap Dragons
- Hostas (smaller varieties)

Colors used in container gardens can evoke a particular mood:

- Red: arousing, draws attention, stimulates conversation
- Yellow: attracts attention, evokes cheerfulness
- Pink: soothing, relaxing
- White: tidy, neat, reflects moonlight
- Blue: calm, refreshing, cool
- Green: unifies colors, easy to look at

And don't forget there's nothing wrong with using just a single plant! Can be very elegant in a beautiful container.