

## Why Choose Containers

For many gardeners, space is a major consideration. Container gardens allow us to garden where there isn't any soil. It allows the gardener to experiment with different plant combinations without planting a flower bed, or create a landscape where it would otherwise be impossible.

## Choosing The Container

The container influences both the design as well as the budget. The choices are endless and range from basic plastic baskets to moss baskets to specialty terra-cotta, wooden, rattan and other uniquely shaped items. The only "rules" that apply to selecting a container is that it needs to be able to hold soil and allow for sufficient drainage. Apart from that, let your imagination wander.



## Choosing the Site

It is important to choose a location that is appropriate for the plant's needs (sun or shade). In the case of hanging baskets, many do best if they get some shade during the day. Try to avoid the hot noon sun. If possible, choose a protected location out of the prevailing winds. Geraniums, Million Bells, Supertunia, and Scaevola have good wind resistance.

## Soil

The planting media needs to have three key elements. It needs to be well drained, have the capacity to hold enough water so that maintaining adequate soil moisture is not a problem, and at the same time provide enough aeration for good root health.

## Designing the Container

The selection of plant material is almost unlimited, whether the basket or container will consist of a single variety or a combination of plants.



There are, however, a few "Do's and Don'ts" involved in designing your container:

- ❖ Avoid rampant growing plants that may take over the container.
- ❖ Avoid combining plants that have differences in vigor.
- ❖ Avoid plants that may grow too tall and require staking.
- ❖ Plant small transplants so they will grow together naturally.
- ❖ Combine plants that have similar cultural requirements such as light, water, nutrition, etc.
- ❖ Limit the number of plant types to three to five.
- ❖ Plant in a repetitive pattern around the pot for symmetry.
- ❖ Plant taller plants in the center of the container and trailing plants around the edge.
- ❖ Use climbing vines to cover container hangers.
- ❖ Use plant colors that do not clash with the container color.
- ❖ Use plants that will add height; flat top baskets look plain.
- ❖ Note that there are exceptions to all these rules!

## Principles of Design

There are a few basic design concepts to keep in mind when planning your container.

### Composition

Composition deals with harmony, relationships and unity of the design. It is the overall visual impression of the container garden. It involves the selection of the plants, choice of container and the setting where the container garden will be placed.

### Balance

A container garden should look balanced, not top-heavy and falling over, or short and squatty. To create a container that looks stable it must be visually balanced both vertically and horizontally. There are two types of balance: symmetrical or asymmetrical.

### Proportion

The right proportion contributes to the overall appeal of the container. When putting a container garden together, keep the size and quantity of the plants in scale to each other and the pot. Use larger and/or more plants in larger containers, and less or smaller plants in small containers. Keep in mind if the mature size of the plant will still be in proportion to the pot size. Also, try not to mix vigorous growing and slow growing plants together as the slower growing plants will not be able to compete and may be overpowered.

## Focus

This is the point or area where your eye is drawn first. An effective way to develop focus in a container garden is to use contrast in texture, form or color. The focal point should be placed below the tallest point in the container garden to achieve balance.

## Rhythm

Rhythm is a feeling of smooth motion in a composition. Repetition and gradation of plant form, texture, and color develop rhythm. Repeating color at regular intervals around the outside of a round container or along the length of a long rectangular container are ways to give rhythm to a container.

## Elements of Design

These are the plant's characteristics. The elements of design most important in designing container gardens include form, texture and color.

### Form

It is best to vary the form of the plant material you choose; use tall linear species to add height, mounded species to add mass, and low growing, cascading species to fill in, add depth and soften the edges of the container; sometimes called: thrillers, fillers and spillers. Three to five species in one container garden would be minimal to achieve an assortment of forms and textures.

### Texture

Adding coarse, medium and fine textured plants into one container garden adds interest and eye-appeal. Texture is found in the overall size and shape of the whole plant, the size and arrangement of the plant's flowers and leaves, and the quality of their surfaces. It can also be a part of the container itself.

### Color

The easiest way to make an impact with mixed containers is by effectively using color. There are several ways to use color to add interest and appeal to your container gardens.

Color echoing uses the repetition of a color from one cultivar to another. For example, using a white flower to echo the white in a green and white variegated foliage plant.

Color contrast combinations use complimentary colors such as yellow/orange tones mixed with blue/purple colors.

## Foliage & Component Plants

Foliage plays an important role in design and in practical importance. Foliage offers texture, color and

consistency. Choose foliar color to either harmonize with or contrast to the chosen flower colors. Grey or silver acts as an enhancer and harmonizes especially well with warm colors. Grey in a pastel arrangement often benefits from the addition of a slight contrast in a dark leaf or deep color. Silver gray mimics the color white and has a brightening effect. Purple foliage in combination with lavender or pink flowers enhances their effect. By adding a darker contrasting tone to a composition, the effect is subtle. On the other end of the spectrum, any bright yellow foliage, like Ipomea margarita, represents a strong contrast to red flowers to create a dazzling effect.

### Planting the Container



Start by filling the container to about 80 percent capacity allowing room for the root balls of the plants. Set the plants inside the container until you have a pleasing arrangement. Working from the center of the container to the edges. Once the arrangement has been determined, remove the plants from their pots, breaking up the root balls with your fingers as you plant. This may damage the roots slightly, encouraging the plant to produce new, lateral roots that will grow into the surrounding soil mix. Add more soil mix if necessary to bring the soil level to within an inch or two of the top of the container. Water thoroughly with a dilute mixture of water-soluble fertilizer or root stimulator.

### Maintaining the Container Garden

#### Watering

Watering is a key maintenance issue with container gardens. The amount and frequency of watering will depend on the type of container used, the location of the container in regards to sun and shade; the type of plants used, and the time of year. The goal should be to provide enough water to encourage healthy root and

top growth. Insufficient water will result in small plants with correspondingly small flowers, while too much water will result in excess soft, lush growth. A general rule is to water in the morning to avoid diseases. It is recommended to give a good thorough dose less often instead of a little sprinkling every day. Check for watering by pressing your finger an inch down in the soil. Or with hanging baskets a good method for checking if watering is needed is to simply lift it with one hand and get a feel for its weight. In mixed containers often times one plant variety will start wilting first making it a good indicator. Some varieties are more drought tolerant, like Lantanas, Portulaca, & Geraniums. Keep in mind, on a hot and/or windy summer day you might have to water twice a day!

#### Fertilizing

In order to maintain container gardens at their peak of quality, not only is proper watering essential, but also proper fertilization. Nutrients are readily leached from the soil due to frequent watering. Again this is dependant on the plant varieties. Begonias, New Guinea Impatiens, and Impatiens, are low feeders. Geraniums, Fuchsias, Lantanas and Verbenas are medium feeders. Trailing Petunias want a lot of food and extra iron. A good rule of thumb suggests using a dilute nutrient solution of Proven Winners 24-12-17 and fertilize every watering. Another popular way to fertilize containers is to use timed-released fertilizers such as Osmocote. They work by releasing nutrients each time water is applied.

#### Grooming

During the growing season, the removal of spent flowers (deadheading) and the occasional pinching back of growth will help to maintain healthy and attractive container plantings. If the plants start to crowd each other out, simply cut away some branches. This thinning also allows more air circulation thereby preventing diseases. If the plants start to look "tired & ragged" it may need to be cut back. After 2-3 weeks they will bloom again and look fresh.

#### Insects/Disease

It is important to check containers frequently for insects like aphids, spider mites, etc. and diseases like powdery mildew. Caught in time, there is a better chance to get the problem under control.

***Have fun! Let your imagination unfold!***

## Creating Captivating Combination Containers



There is a tendency to think of container plantings as only an accent for the patio, front door or window. But containers offer gardeners so much more. Mixed container plantings are mobile gardens, bringing variety and texture close to home. Successful container gardens are like successful landscape plantings, gardens or borders: they require a good color scheme and sufficient contrast in form and shape to make them work. This guide will explain some of the key elements to creating a captivating and successful combination container.



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