



Container Gardening

If you think container gardening means a few pansies in a pot, think again! Today's container gardening incorporates gorgeous annuals, specimen shrubs, exotic tropicals, prolific perennials, classic ivy, architectural bamboo, natural stone, decorative grasses, etc. even if you don't have room for a garden! You can be as creative as you want whether you're a city dweller and pressed for space, or you're simply looking to dress up a patio or entry-way. By planting your choice of great plants into a container you can get the effect of a vibrant garden on a smaller scale without the demands of a large garden.



The Location

Before you purchase plants, have a look at the area you are putting your containers. Is it sunny? Shady? A little of both? A sunny area has more than 6 hours of sun. Afternoon sun is better. A shady area is a location without direct sunlight. (usually the north side) Anything else is partial sun. Once you know what your lighting is like - you can pick the plants best suited to your area.

The Container

The most important thing to take into consideration while choosing a container is how functional it is for the plant. Adequate size and drainage should always be a priority. In order to ensure healthy roots, soil must drain properly. When choosing your container, it is imperative to look for drainage holes. If they are not present, holes can be easily made in some containers.

Choosing the right style

The right container for your garden is one that will enhance the contained plants or in the location in which they are displayed. You can be creative with your containers. An old decorative watering can, or wagon can an interest. The right style of container is whatever is right for you.

Choosing the Right Material

Some materials used for containers are more porous than others. Materials like terra-cotta and wood allow better air circulation and enable the root system to breathe. However, with a more porous material, the soil may dry out faster need to be monitored for watering more often. Materials like glazed terra-cotta and plastic hold soil moisture better, yet drainage may not be as efficient. Adequate drainage holes must be present in such containers.

Choosing the Right Size

A container that is too small will constrict the roots and not allow root system development. A container that is too large may leave the extra soil too wet and prevent drainage.

The Plants

There is no reason to limit yourself to summer annuals when planting your containers. A mix of perennials, annuals, and evergreens can help create year round interest. Decide what the purpose of the planter is when choosing your plants. Your container will be a success if you keep in mind the following 4 points when choosing your plants:

1. the type of exposure the plants like
2. the eventual size and shape of the plant
3. the colour, texture and shape of the flowers and foliage.
4. keep it simple. too many different elements can result in a busy looking container.

Many very simple designs use only three kinds of plants. One forms the center or backbone of the container. Lower bushy plants give substance to the arrangement and trailing plants placed at the edge of the container tumble down the sides, creating a softer look.

Foliage and texture is a great way to add substance to your container without adding yet another type of flower. Broad leaves like that of Canna lilies add great interest and come in a variety of colours. Spikes create a heightened look while ferns tend to soften. It is a good idea to use several textures in your containers, as different textures show each other off when they contrast.

The Care

Soil

It is important to use a good quality container mix when planting your planters. Sea Soil potting mix is a great option as well as Nurseryland Container Mix. Both contain a mix of peat moss, perlite and compost. Nurseryland container mix also contains water retention crystals and a slow release fertilizer.

Fertilizer

Using a slow release fertilizer ensures your plants are fertilized for the season. Nurseryland 14-14-14 is recommended. Along with a slow release fertilizer it is beneficial to give flowering plants a shot of 20-20-20 or 15-30-15 a little later in the season. This will give them an instant boost and send them into flower again and again.

Watering

The weather, outdoor temperature and type of container have an impact on how much water your container will drink. Check to see if your plant needs water by inserting your finger into the soil. The first inch should be dry and the rest moist. If the soil is drier than this, water thoroughly until water comes out the bottom. Do not let your plants sit in water. Watering in the morning helps to prevent mildews from spreading on wet foliage and root rot from developing on cold nights.

How to Plant

Water should be able to drain freely from the pot. Covering the drain holes with light fabric (panty hose or window screen work as well), you do not want the soil to clog the hole not allowing the water to drain through.

Fill your container half way with soil. Tap the pot on the surface you are working on so that it packs down. Potting mixes tend to be quite light and airy and will settle.

Begin with your tallest plant and remember that it does not always have to go in the center: Next, start placing into the container, mixing colours and textures as you go. Be sure to keep trailing plants to the outside of the container.

When filling a container with potting mix, avoid adding the mix all the way to the rim. Without sufficient head room at the top of the pot, water will run off rather than soak into the pot. Instead leave at least an inch or room below the rim of the container so thirsty plants will have an opportunity to drink the water.

Once you have finished planting, water give your planter a good drink.

Things to consider..

Avoid a flat look. Add a spike, tall plant or garden ornament for height.

Choose plants in scale with your container.

Large plants can overwhelm small spaces and small plants make little impact on large spaces.

Your plants will grow. You may buy a small trailing petunia but remember to keep in consideration the size that it will reach.

Consider whether the container will be viewed from one side of several angles, and position the plants accordingly.

NOTES



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