

# Container Gardening

## ☼ Advantages

- It's a portable garden
- You can control the soil quality
- Works well for those with little or no land
- Easy access to the plants, convenience

## ☼ Disadvantages

- Containers require more frequent watering
- Container plants are more prone to overheating and freezing
- Plants may need repotting as they grow

*When putting together a container garden consider the location for the planter; plant selection and culture; and basic design principles for color and style.*

*Container Gardens are little eco-systems.*



## ☼ Choosing a Container

- Bigger is better. Bigger pots do not dry out as quickly. However, for design purposes, container gardens look best when the plants and container are in balance. Plants shouldn't be more than twice the height of the pot or 1 1/2 times as wide.
- Good drainage is essential. Make sure your container has drainage holes that are about 1/2 inch across.
- Dark colored pots will get hot in summer sun.
- Avoid containers with narrow openings.

### ● Types of containers

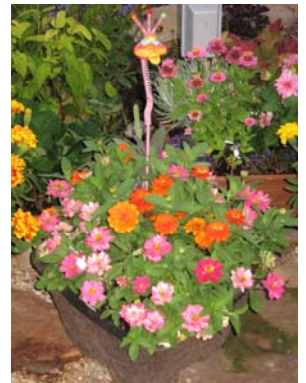
- **Clay or terra cotta** – porous but dries out more quickly. Plants in clay pots may require more frequent watering. Do not overwinter well.
- **Wood** – good water retention. Use a wood that doesn't rot easily.
- **Plastic** – retains moisture but have less aeration.
- **Concrete** – maintains soil temperature and moisture. Heavy – great if you need a planter the dog can't knock over.
- **Ceramic** – retains moisture as well. Do not overwinter well.
- **Metal** – Heat up and need frequent watering. Overwinter well.
- **Hanging Baskets** – tend to dry out very quickly.
- **Fiberglass and resin** – attractive, light, durable, inexpensive and frost-resistant.



## ☼ Plant Selection

*When choosing plants think pillar, filler, spiller, color and culture. See plant lists.*

- The well balanced composition, the container garden, should have at least 1 tall pillar, 1 filler and 1 spiller. Plants shouldn't be more than twice the height of the pot or more than 1 1/2 times as wide.
  - **Pillars** -- A whimsical plant stake or statue can act as a pillar in the composition. Vines on trellis can also be used as pillars. (Morning glory, Nasturtium, scarlet runner, canary creeper.)
  - **Filler plants** -- Also remember that the foliage is a part of the design. Filler plants can make or break a container garden. Great foliage is often the key to a great container.
  - **Spiller plants** -- Remember that the pot is a part of the design. If you want to show off a container, you may not want to plant spiller plants. In the case the pot would act as the spiller in the composition.



- **Color** – choose a color scheme. The pot is a part of the color scheme. If you choose an orange or terra-cotta pot, orange or terra-cotta will be a part of the color scheme. For drama and impact go for contrast. For harmony and tranquility stay with one color in different shades. See color information sheets.
- **Culture** – choose plants with similar cultural requirements. For example, you wouldn't want to plant sedum and impatiens in the same pot.

**The basic elements of culture to consider are water, light, soil pH and growth rate.**

- **Water** All the plants should have similar water requirements. In the example above, sedums need very little water. Impatiens require a lot of water. As a result these two plants are not compatible.
- **Light** All the plants should have similar light requirements. In the example above, sedums require full sun whereas impatiens prefer shade. It is best to err on the side of having to move a planter to give it more light if it is not thriving, than to outright kill the plants with too much sun.
  - **Full Sun** -- At least 6 full hours of direct sunlight each day.
  - **Part Sun / Part Shade** -- 3-6 hours of direct sun, preferably in the morning and early afternoon.
  - **Full Shade** -- Less than 3 hours of direct sunlight each day with filtered sunlight during the rest of the day. Full shade does not mean no sun.
- **Soil pH** The plants should have similar pH requirements. In most cases this isn't a problem, especially with annuals. Most plants do well in a soil pH of about 6.5.
- **Growth Rate** A fast growing plant can quickly take over a container of slower growing plants.

## ✿ Tips for planting and maintaining your container

- **Soil** Always use a good quality, sterile potting soil. Garden soil does not have enough drainage and aeration to be suitable for container use. Fill the pot up to an inch from the rim.
- **Planting**
  - Make vertical cuts on the root ball to encourage the roots to grow throughout the pot.
  - After planting gently water the plants until water runs out from the drainage holes.
  - Plant too many plants rather than too few. Err on the side of extra plants for a lush full effect.
- **Water**
  - Containers dry out quickly. Container plants require frequent watering.
  - As a general rule – Don't water until the top 1 inches of soil feel dry to the touch then water until water runs from the bottom of the container.
  - If the potting mix is allowed to dry excessively, the potting media will shrink away from the sides of the container and will be difficult to re-wet.
- **Fertilizing**
  - Mix a time release fertilizer into the soil before planting.
  - Use a dilute liquid fertilizer during the growing season to replenish water-soluble nutrients that are washed out of the soil by the frequent watering.
  - A good general fertilizer for most plants is 20-20-20 – meaning it has equal parts nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus.
  - Do not fertilize dry soil. Water the plants thoroughly the day before fertilizing. Fertilizer can burn sensitive roots hairs if the roots are dry.  
Fertilize once every two weeks during the growing season.
- **Keep it fresh**
  - Keep the flowers deadheaded, and yellow or brown leaves picked off.
  - If a plant starts to fade, replace it with another plant. Don't be afraid to switch out plant material as the seasons change.

*Sources:* <http://www.lowes.com/lowes/lkn?action=howTo&p=LawnGarden/Container.html&rn=RightNavFiles/rightNavHowTo>  
<http://gardening.about.com/od/gardendesign/tp/ContainerGarden.htm>  
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