



GROW NATURAL

It's good for your health

CONTAINER GARDENING

Pots and planters are great on patios, rooftops and balconies, or just as pots of colour in your garden!

Choosing a container:

Suitable containers can be any size and material but consideration must be given to the size of the plants, as well as to the required amount of soil medium and the need for drainage. Most plants require good drainage, so drainage holes are essential to prevent root damage or death. However, remember that some plants, such as bog, pondside or water plants, float in water or require moist or wet soil. You can improve drainage and use less soil mix (for larger containers) by putting stones or broken shards of pots in the bottom. Also try self-watering containers.

The right soil mix:

Choose a mix that is lightweight, especially for hanging baskets. Soilless mixes (a combination of peat moss, perlite and vermiculite) are convenient, lightweight and weed free but are low in plant nutrient. Add small amounts of weed free compost or well-rotted manure to add nutrients.

Fertilize with bone and blood meal or granular slow release fertilizer. Always work with your potting mixture slightly damp or wet. Look for potting mixes that contain polymer gels, which help to prevent pots from drying in the summer. Garden centres may also sell products to help retain water (e.g. sponge products).

Design Elements:

- Plant choices: Select a mix of suitable annuals, herbs, perennials, shrubs or vegetables
- Balance: Consider the colour, shape and texture of both your plants and container. Plants should be no more than 2 times the height of the container once mature.
- Number of containers: Design experts recommend using an odd number of containers in a given location versus an even number.

Planting Your Container:

Use a clean container and soak those that are porous. Choose your plants based on the growing conditions (e.g. drought tolerant plants for extremely hot and dry conditions, or shade plants for covered balconies). Make sure to water your selection prior to planting to help stick the soil to the roots. Remove root, if necessary, for fit.

Start with a plant in the centre for height. You may have to use your imagination to visualize the mature size of the plant - read the label! Next, add medium height plants around in odd numbers. Finally, add trailing plants (closer to the edge) and more soil to secure all plants. Water thoroughly.

Consider using a mixture of plants that will provide colour and/or form (both leaf and bloom) during the entire growing season, or plants that provide form during the winter months (e.g. ornamental grasses).

Maintaining Your Container:

Pinch off the ends of shoots and any flowers or flower buds after planting, or when the plant is still young and leggy, to encourage growth.

The most important job requirement for maintaining a planted container is to water consistently. Do not let your container completely dry out! A watering regimen will depend on the location and size of the container as well as growing conditions. For example, containers in windy, hot conditions will dry out more quickly than similar sized ones in protected, partial-shade conditions. Small containers will generally require water more frequently than larger containers. Remember that water will evaporate faster in some containers (e.g. porous ones) than in others (e.g. plastic). The need for water will also depend on the species planted.

Containers often need water each day. In the heat of the summer you may have to water small containers several times a day. Water thoroughly but gently, until water runs out the drainage holes. Once the plants start growing, remember to fertilize. At a minimum, feed your plants a balanced, water-soluble fertilizer every few weeks. Plants in outside containers require fertilizing more frequently because of rapid plant growth and because frequent watering will cause nutrients to leach from the soil. Always wet the soil before adding fertilizer solution to avoid burning dry roots. Be careful to follow instructions on the label of the fertilizer.

Deadhead blossoms by pinching off the dead blooms. This will encourage the plant to produce more flowers.

Advantages of Container Gardening:

- Containers can be used anywhere and bring beauty to a large variety of areas (e.g. hanging baskets, on balconies, patios, windows or even rooftops).
- Plants can be grown in containers that are not suitable for your garden condition (e.g. sandy soil, heavy clay, damp conditions).
- Container plants can be easily moved indoors at the end of the growing season.
- Container plants are protected from some pests (e.g. slugs, snails).
- Containers can be chosen to complement a garden's design (e.g. wood for casual gardens or wrought iron for more formal gardens) or to meet a variety of design goals (e.g. mask unsightly areas or accentuate those that are functional).
- Containers can be planted and maintained by persons who have limited physical abilities.

References:

The Toronto Botanical Garden Weston Family Library
Container Gardening Through the Year, Malcolm Hillier, Dorling Kindersley Publishing, 1991

The New Bedding Plant Expert, Dr. D.G. Hessayon, Expert Books, 1997