

CONTAINER GARDENING

Gardening with containers adds so much interest to porches, fences, and backyards. Hanging baskets, pots of many shapes and sizes are used to add beauty to your urban gardens. These containers are mini gardens themselves that express certain moods and the gardener's personality. When certain rules, techniques, and suggestions are followed, these containers will draw the homeowner and guests to the gardens many times.

Anything can be used for a container as long as it has a hole to drain excess water. Anything can be grown in containers filled with soil. Vegetables, herbs and grasses in pots as well as flowers are all eye catchers. A variety of vegetation with different shaped leaves and green colors can be grown in pots as well as colorful berries. Think of the various shapes such as round, erect, prostrate, and weeping and keep your garden in balance (e.g. not too much on one side). All of these are sure to catch the gardeners' eye. One of the biggest benefits of containers is they are moveable. They can be moved in or out of sun or shade.

Start with a landscaping idea. Gather pots and baskets of uniform shapes and sizes. Remember the four basic design properties: Proximity (group close), Alignment (large to small), Contrast (adds interest in colors), Repetition with flowers and leaves (makes a statement).

Next, prepare the containers with soil. Do not use soil dug up from the yard or ground gardens as it is too compact. Potting soil can be purchased in bags. A potting mix should be used, such as Miracle-Gro, or you can make your own. If the drain hole on the container is too large, place a small pebble on top. Pour the soil mixture into a container until it reaches $\frac{3}{4}$ full.

Plant roots grow only in the top 6-8 inches of soil. If a large pot is used, fill the bottom with a lighter mix of soil material. Large pots can be placed on a platform with wheels and wheeled most anywhere the gardener desires.

Now the planting begins . . . the time of self- expression. A good way to start the design is to remember the adage: Thrill, fill, and spill. The thrill is the focal point, the tallest plant in a container, either a grass or a flower on a long stem; the fill is the low-growing plant to cover the inside of the container; the spill is the flowers or foliage that drape down and over the side of the container.

When selecting flowers, remember the tried-and-true color wheel. Colors opposite on the color wheel create excitement; colors next to each other on the color wheel create harmony. So, to create a thrill, plant flowers next to each other that are opposite on the color wheel. Alternatively, to create a calming environment, plant monochromatic (same colors) next to each other. For a further calming effect, use pots of the same color as the flowers. For example, plant differing shades of purple flowers next or close to each other and use purple-painted pots.

Plant various plants that require lots of water together in the same pot, separate from drought-resistant plants. Likewise, grow sun-loving plants in the same pot separate from shade-loving plants.

Fragrant flowers such as gardenia, roses, and lilies placed in pots on the porch will create a mood of relaxation. Hanging baskets, either plastic or lined with sphagnum moss, can be placed on the eaves around porches or around the eaves of the whole house.

Remember that all vegetative-filled containers require more water and more fertilization than do plants growing in the ground. Hanging baskets require the

most water. A drip irrigation system is a very efficient and effective way to keep the containers well-watered. It saves water and reduces plant stress.

Remember to mulch the containers after planting. This will retain moisture and keep out weeds. Also remember to remove old mulch each year and add fresh as the old mulch will settle and degrade.

Finally, remember that flowers still need to be dead headed and bushes pruned.

The best way to know what the best plants and flowers are to grow in Oklahoma is to refer to the web site: www.provenplants.com.

Additional fact sheet references:

HLA-6402 (Children's Gardens In Which To Learn And Grow)

HLA-6425 (Homeowner Garden Design)

HLA-6430 (Landscaping To Attract Butterflies, Moths, and Skippers)

HLA-6444 (Drought Tolerant Plant Selections For Oklahoma)

HLA-6706 (Containers and Media For The Nursery)

BAE-1511 (Drip Irrigation Systems)