

## ***Container Gardening***

Planting in containers has transcended years of used metal coffee pots, old tires, and wheel barrels. In fact, container planting provides garden enthusiasts an opportunity to take advantage of mirroring largescale landscapes using scaled down replicas. Don't forget the allure of shoe planters. It's always a great idea to take the old cowboy boots, rain boots or work boots to create a container plant. Just make certain to drill holes in the bottom for proper drainage.

Aside from increased watering requirements over typical flower beds and large-scale maintenance hassles, container gardening presents a more shape, size, color, and mobile-friendly environment. Follow these simple steps to ensure your success:

### **Type of Plant**

When assessing the type of plant, consider whether it's tropical, native, perennial, or annual (and one plant can be a variation of each). Tropicals will need to be brought indoors during winter months. However, elephant ears are perennials in our zone and a great looking container variety. If this is your choice, make certain to plant them in a winter-hardy container and cover with 3-4 inches of mulch for overwintering. And speaking of perennials, how 'bout them tulips? With a vast variety of colors, textures and seasonal availability, tulips in containers provide a punch, lots of color, and true variety. While annuals may require a bit more maintenance, they sure pack a lot of color and variety. Go outside the comfort zone to blend different types of plants for seasonal growth to ensure full color, texture, and size. Go for the "*thriller, filler, spiller*" look. This guarantees a spike of color and/or texture in the very center of your container, a filling of spreader type plant (i.e., bishops weed), and the spiller for plants that will spill over the top of your container spiraling downward.

## **Types of Pots**

It's a great choice to use huge pots for plants like ornamental grasses, elephant ears, and yuccas. If it takes some time for the plant to mature, you can rest assured that you'll need a larger pot. If you're considering fruiting plants in containers (tomatoes, peppers) remember to use more soil. Remember with fruiting plants to not overcrowd but feel free to use a variety. And because it gets really hot in our zone, if you choose to use terracotta containers, be prepared to water daily (maybe twice daily – morning and evening) as they will dry out quickly. Avoid watering in the midday heat.

## **Direct Sun – Wind and Natural Elements**

If your gardening space lacks full sun for sun-loving plants, here's your opportunity to select plants that require less sun, like Hostas. If your space gets lots of wind, a lattice will serve as a great windbreak. Consider surrounding your garden with a windbreak like a nice lattice that you can stain a rich color and place in a strategic location.

## **Potting Mix and Soil Blend**

It's fine to use potting mix - just make certain it's rich in compost. Better yet, many nurseries have a unique blend of potting soil that works well. One word of major caution never use soil from your yard in your containers. It can create a mountain of headaches. First, the soil will pack too hard in the container over time. And, maybe even worse, you're likely transplanting insects, weeds, and plain old grass into your "controlled container". While not every insect is harmful, if you do add any harmful insects to your protected, isolated area, it may create a disastrous environment for a long time. Go the extra mile to use a high-quality potting soil in your container.

So, go ahead and plant in containers and watch your garden grow while you enjoy the bounty. Whether you have a small or larger space, low light or full sun, there are many options for container gardening which make it rewarding, enjoyable, and fun.