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. 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 is tropical, native, perennial, or annual (noting that sometimes one plant can be a variation of each). Note that tropical plants typically need to be brought indoors during winter months. Elephant ears, a great-looking container variety, can be made a perennial by planting them in a winter-hardy container and covering with 3-4 inches of mulch. So, how about tulips? With a vast variety of colors, textures and seasonal availability, tulips in containers provide a punch with lots of color and variety. While annuals may require a bit more maintenance, they pack a lot of color and variety. When blending different types of container plants, plant for seasonal growth to ensure full color, texture, and size. Think about container planting in terms of: Thriller, Filler, and Spiller. This guarantees a spike of color and/or texture in the very center of your container ("Thriller", like Purple Fountain Grass), a spreader-type plant ("Filler", like Bishops Weed), and the plants that will flow out of the container and spill over the top of your container spiraling downward ("Spiller", like Moneywort). Very cool!

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 (e.g. tomatoes, peppers), remember to use more soil. A particularly good Rule of Thumb: don't overcrowd, but feel free to use a variety. And, because it gets really hot in our zone, if you use terracotta containers, they will dry out very quickly. It would not be unusual to find yourself watering in the morning AND the evening.

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. Most notable nurseries have a unique blend of potting soil that works very well. Here's a huge **word of caution** – don't ever use soil from your yard to build your containers. It can create a mountain of headaches such as transplanting insects, weeds, and plain old grass into your "controlled container". Not every insect is harmful but, if you accidentally add the harmful insects to your protected isolated area, you may find yourself introducing these insects and contaminants to your protected environment and creating a breeding ground for them to thrive and stay alive.

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.

And, by the way, don't forget the allure of shoe planters. It's always a great idea to take the old cowboy boots (Go Pokes!), rain boots or work boots to create a container plant. Make certain to drill holes for proper drainage and watch your garden grow. It's hard to go wrong.