

## **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 large scale 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's tropical, native, perennial or annual (be aware that one plant can be a variation of each). Tropical plants will generally need to be brought indoors during winter months. One exception is that elephant ears are perennials in our zone and are 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 with lots of color and variety. While annuals may require a bit more maintenance, they can pack a lot of color into a small area. Blend different types of container plants for seasonal growth to ensure full color, texture and size. A common container planting technique is called: *thriller, filler and spiller*. This guarantees a spike of color and/or texture in the very center of your container (Thriller), a filling of spreader type plant (Filler), and plants that will flow out of the container and spill over the top of your container spiraling downward (Spiller).

### **Types of Pots**

It's a great choice to use huge pots for plants such as 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, remember to use more soil. Don't overcrowd but feel free to use a variety. And, because it gets really hot in our zone, if you choose to use terracotta containers, remember they can dry out very quickly. In most cases you will need to water every day; in some cases (ferns, for instance) you may need to water a couple of times per day. Bear this in mind when using terracotta.

### **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, 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, Soil Blend and Drainage**

It's fine to use potting mix - just make certain it's rich in compost. Many nurseries have a unique blend of potting soil that works 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 the potential for transplanting insects, weeds and plain old grass into your "controlled container". Not all insects are harmful; however, if you happen to add some harmful insects to your protected isolated area, it may create a disastrous environment. Finally, good drainage is a must. All containers must drain well, which is another reason to use a good blend of potting soil/mix.

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 quite rewarding, enjoyable and fun. And, by the way, don't forget the allure of shoe planters. It's always in style to take old cowboy boots, rain boots or work boots to create a container plant – just make sure to drill holes for proper drainage and watch your garden grow.