

## Container Gardening

You can enjoy a variety of vegetables and flowers, even though your free time and growing space is limited. Just plant a container garden! The variety of colors shapes and textures that these small treasures offer makes them garden favorites. With increased urbanization, container gardens come to the rescue to brighten up patios and balconies.

Container gardens are versatile. This concept can be applied to hanging baskets, containers can be placed on the windowsill, by the backdoor, on the balcony or patio and around the garden. Containers can also be mounted on castors and arranged in different groups and even protected inside during the cold months. You can re-create almost any type of environment and select plants for it—from sun, shade, aquatic, to desert. You can choose containers from a great variety of colors, textures, forms and sizes.

For best results, select plants for optimal performance depending on the seasons, cool-loving plants for spring and fall gardens, and heat-loving plants for summer gardens. Because you are working within a limited amount of space for best results you should try to adhere to some basic design principles. A few principles are; focus, balance, form (each plant in the design has a growth habit, or form. Some plants have a strong upright habit), texture (some plants have linear leaves, like grasses, and dracaena spike). Rhythm; is achieved by planting same or similar-looking plants at repeated intervals. Proportion: to keep plants and container in proportion and achieve a balanced appearance, the height of the plants should not exceed more than 2/3 the height of the container. For shallow or small containers, choose plants that will not get too large and/or choose plants with small-sized foliage. For large or tall containers, choose plants with medium to high mature size and/or plants with large leaves.

### Tips For Making Container Gardening:

Mix plants with at least three textures of foliage to make a container garden interesting. Use plenty of plants that are foliage plants, with no flowers, because foliage color, leaf shape, and texture are just as important as the flowers. Some good foliage contrasts include: downy with glossy; small with large; and yellow, or lime-green with violet. Coleus cultivars are available in a great variety of foliage colors, shapes and sizes. They can also help 'echo' the color of flowers in the container. Vary the shape of the flowers in the container to add interest, for example petunia vs. verbena. Also use bicolor flowers. Vegetative annuals mix well with other annuals, perennials and tropicals. Everything and anything goes as long as it pleases your eye.

Positioning the plants in the container is very important. To use any plant in the right place for maximum effect, you need to be familiar with the various plant positions in the container garden. Center plants provide compact, upright growth to fill in the crown of the container. Filler plants typically have compact, upright growth and round out the top of the container. Corner plants grow well over the container's edge and benefit from a corner position where they have maximum elbowroom. Edge plants drape over the side, softening the look of the container and filling out the space between its corners.

The basic rule for a successful container garden is that all plants combined in one container should have similar water, light and fertilizer requirements.

Remember! Nothing lasts forever! Container gardens need to be gardened. Plants need trimming, deadheading, spraying for pests and diseases, weed control, which should be manually by hand, and occasionally replacement.

To learn more about container garden and other related topics contact Grantly Ricketts a Horticulture Agent with UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County at 321-697-3000.