

Container Gardening

Even the smallest patio or porch can boast flowers in containers. Planter boxes, wooden barrels, hanging baskets and large flowerpots are just some of the containers that can be used. The container gardener is limited only by his imagination. Consider the following guidelines when choosing your container.

- Avoid containers with narrow openings.
- Inexpensive plastic pots may deteriorate in UV sunlight and terracotta pots dry out rapidly. Glazed ceramic pots are excellent choices but require several drainage holes.
- Wooden containers are susceptible to rot. Redwood and cedar are relatively rot resistant and can be used without staining or painting. Avoid wood treated with creosote, penta or other toxic compounds since the vapors can damage the plants. One advantage of wooden containers is that they can be built to sizes and shapes that suit the location.
- Use containers between 15 and 120 quarts capacity. Small pots restrict the root area and dry out very quickly. The size and number of plants to be grown will determine the size of the container used..
- Make sure your pot has adequate drainage. Holes should be 1/2 inch across. Line the base of the pot with newspaper to prevent soil loss.
- In hot climates use light-colored containers to lessen heat absorption and discourage uneven root growth.
- Set containers on bricks or blocks to allow free drainage.
- Line hanging baskets with sphagnum moss for water retention. Keep baskets away from afternoon sun.
- If you choose clay pots, remember that clay is porous and water is lost from the sides of the container. Plants in clay pots should be monitored closely for loss of moisture.

Growing Mixture

Make sure your planting medium drains rapidly but retains enough moisture to keep the roots evenly moist. Your [compost](#) will make an excellent potting soil. Check the requirements of the plants you grow to determine whether you will need to add sand. If compost is not available, purchase a good quality potting mixture or make your own from equal parts of sand, loamy garden soil, and peat moss. Commercial potting mixes are usually slightly acidic, so you may want to add a little lime.

Most container gardeners have found that a "soil less" potting mix works best. In addition to draining quickly, "soil less" mixes are lightweight and free from soil-borne diseases and weed seeds. These mixes can be purchased from garden centers.

When you add your soil to your container, leave a 2 inch space between the top of the soil and the top of the container. You will be able to add 1/2 inch or so of mulch later.

Sunlight

Your container garden will need at least five hours of direct sunlight each day, and many plants will benefit from even more. The amount of sunlight needed by flowers varies depending on the varieties grown. Check the [flower guides](#) for sunlight requirements.



Fertilizer

Since potting mixes drain water rapidly, [fertilizer](#) will be washed out of the container as you water. Lighter mixes will require more frequent fertilizing than heavier mixes. It's a good idea to use a dilute liquid fertilizer with every other watering. Liquid [fish emulsion](#) or liquid seaweed are great plant boosters, but remember that you need to provide your plants with a variety of nutrients. Check the labels on the products in your garden center to be sure that they contain a complete, balanced solution that includes trace elements.

Watering

In an exposed location, container plants lose moisture quickly. Some plants will need to be watered daily, especially during hot, dry weather.

What to Grow?

Annuals

Annuals suitable for containers include:

- [Alyssum](#) -- Carpet of Snow, Royal Carpet, Rosie O'Day
- [Begonia \(Wax\)](#) -- Glamour, White Christmas, Othello
- [Browallia](#) -- Blue Bells
- [Coleus](#) -- Red Monarch, Fashion Parade, Magic Lace
- [Cuphea](#) -- Firefly
- [Geraniums](#) -- Most varieties
- [Impatiens](#) -- Tangelow, Elfin Hybrids, Imp Hybrids, Blitz
- [Lantana](#) -- Yellow Compacta, White Compacta
- [Lobelia](#) -- Blue Cascade, Sapphire
- [Marigolds](#) -- Dwarf French, Panther, Queen Sophia, Boy Series
- [Periwinkle](#) (*Vinca rosea*) -- Little Bright Eyes, Little Pinkie
- [Nasturtiums](#) -- Jewel Series
- [Pansies](#) -- Swiss Giant
- [Petunias](#) -- Cascade Hybrids, Comanche, Bernese Hybrids
- [Salvia](#) -- Victoria
- [Sanvitalia](#) -- Gold Braid
- [Snapdragons](#) -- Floral Carpet
- [Thunbergia](#) -- Susie Mix
- [Torenia](#) -- Mixed colors
- [Verbena](#) -- Amethyst, Blaze, Sparkle Mixed Colors
- [Zinnias](#) -- Button Series, Chippendale

