

## CONTAINER GARDENING

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**A. Introduction** - If you don't have space for a vegetable garden or if your outdoor space doesn't provide the necessary elements to produce the flower garden you've always wanted, consider the possibility of "container gardening." A patio, deck, balcony, or doorstep can provide enough space for a productive, attractive display.

If you live in an apartment with limited outdoor space, you might consider doing a little indoor gardening. By using sunny window sills, you can grow a number of herbs.

**Benefits** - Many individuals find container gardening to be advantageous. Each person is unique and has his or her own particular circumstances. They may be:

- disabled with a need for easy accessibility
- gardeners with problem soil
- homeowners with little or no land
- elderly with limited mobility
- apartment/condominium dwellers
- cooks -- gourmet and otherwise
- plant lovers who just can 't get enough of nature



**1. Convenience-** While space (or lack of it) is an obvious reason to try container gardening, this is not the only reason people choose this method. Often, convenience plays a big part, especially for vegetables and herbs. Having these essentially at your fingertips is a tremendous advantage. The mobility of container gardening makes it easy to rearrange and resculpture your garden and to add new elements of interest and beauty.

For busy two-worker families who don't have time to produce a large garden, a number of well-placed pots on the deck often can do the trick. For the elderly who can't garden anymore, sometimes a simple tomato plant conveniently located by the back door may be enough to satisfy the craving for fresh vegetables and to recall memories of days past.

**2. Economy** - Smaller spaces result in smaller costs. Initial set-up costs may be a little more, but once the appropriate containers and materials are purchased, costs are minimal. You will be buying fewer plants, less media, and less fertilizer than for traditional gardening.

**3. Time** - Families today are busier than ever and gardening is time consuming. Container gardening reduces the amount of time you spend tending plants. Whether you plant ornamentals or edibles, care is minimal. Time-release fertilizer and automatic watering systems can reduce that time even more.

4. **Display** - Just as a garden can be a work of art, a well-planned container garden can be attractive as well as useful. Carefully selecting plants will result in a beautiful, yet functional, display with function.

## **B. Basics of Container Gardening**

### **1. Definitions of Common Terms**

**Grow Together Container** - Transplanting an assortment of small plants into 10-inch, 12-inch, or larger container and growing them on to an attractive size.

**Put Together Container** - Transplanting, flowering, usually 4-inch or larger plant material into planters.

**Plant Positions in Container Gardens** - A plant can fulfill different positions in a design depending on the size of the container.

**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 edge, softening the look of the container and filling out the space between its corners.

**Color Bowl** - A small, round container placed on a table top to house compact, annual plants.

**Combination Basket** - A hanging basket which usually holds mounding and trailing plants and excludes tall upright varieties.

**Container Garden** - Includes all shapes and sizes of containers, usually sitting on the ground, sometimes massive enough to hold all types of plant species including woodies, perennials, and bulbs.

2. **Design Principles** - There are several design principles to take into consideration when planning your container gardens.

**Focus** - The point or area where the eye is drawn first. Place the focus below the tallest point to achieve balance. Develop focus by using large, coarse, or bright colored plant material in that area. All plant material should radiate out from the focus.

**Balance** - A feeling of stability. Symmetrical balance is equal, almost identical elements on each side of a central axis, with the highest point over the center.

Asymmetrical balance is when the two sides of the central axis are not mirror images but have the same visual weight.

**Form** - Vary the form of the plant material you choose; use tall linear species to add height; mounded species to add mass; and low growing, cascading species to fill in, add depth, and soften the edges of the container.

**Texture** - Add coarse, medium, and fine textured plants together. Three to five species will achieve an assortment of forms and textures. Use variation and gradation of form and texture.

**Rhythm** - Repeat color at regular intervals around the outside of a round container or along the length of a long rectangular container. Repeat color in several containers to "tie" them together. Graceful lines of plant leaves add flow and rhythm.

**Proportion** - Use larger and/or more plants in larger containers, and less and/or smaller plants in small containers. Rule of thumb is the height of the tallest plant should not exceed 1X-2X the height of the container excluding pedestals and "air-fairy" sprigs. Best to use odd numbers: one, three, five or seven plants of each cultivar.

### 3. Color Theory

There are several ways to use color to add interest and appeal to your container gardens. Two of these are, using color echoing and different color harmonies.

“**Color echoing**” is using repetition of a color from one cultivar to another. For example, using a white flower to echo the white in a green and white variegated foliage. Repetition of any design element adds rhythm to the design and leads your eye around and around the design!

Color Harmonies		
Color Scheme	Definition	Effect / Use
<u>Monochromatic</u>	Lightness or darkness or strength of the color may vary, but only one color is used	Quiet and soothing
<u>Analogous</u>	Colors closely related to one another (next to each other) on the color wheel	More dramatic than monochromatic
<u>Complementary</u>	Colors opposite one another on the color wheel	Demands attention
<u>Neutral</u>	Black, gray, and white	Add depth to the composition; make other colors look brighter and deeper; divide colors that clash or are too strong; tone down complementary color schemes in daylight; and glow in the dark
<u>Polychrome</u>	Mixture of many colors	This works most of the time because flowers naturally blend together

#### 4. Tips for Making Container Gardens

- 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) in your designs. In most cases, foliage color, leaf shape, and texture are just as important as the flowers themselves.
- Some good foliage contrasts would include: downy with glossy; dark with gray; small with large; yellow with violet.
- Use colorful foliage (like Coleus) to “echo” the color of flowers in the container.
- Vary the shape of the flowers in the container garden to add interest.
- Bicolor flowers are becoming more available and are great for color echoing.
- Sometimes you just have to do some “snipping and tucking” of faster growing plants when they are mixed in with slower growing ones. Otherwise, you will lose the slower ones and your design gets destroyed.
- Vegetative annuals mix well with other annuals, perennials, tropicals, and bulbs. Everything and anything goes as long as it is pleasing to the eye.
- Nothing lasts forever! Container gardens need to be gardened. Plants in container gardens need to be trimmed, dead-headed and replaced.

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<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/floriculture/container-garden/index.html>

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