



## Container Gardening

### Small Space, Big Results

Hanging baskets and containers have long been a staple in folks' gardens during the summer months, but small space gardening has become more of a mainstay and less of a novelty over the past few years. Many people are now living in smaller homes with smaller yards, others have less time to devote to gardening, and some just like to keep their options open from year to year! Whatever the desire to participate in small space gardening may be, there are a few key things to keep in mind to help you maximize your tiny garden's tremendous potential.

### Location

As with any garden, the more light you have, the more options you have. You can still do plenty in shady spots, but if you are able to situate containers in an area that receives four to six hours of direct sunlight each day, you'll be able to grow that much more and include vegetables in the mix too. In addition to sunlight, a spot with good air flow is ideal.

Live close to your neighbours? Check your strata guidelines before starting your garden. Balcony gardeners should keep run-off in mind too... you'll have to plant in such a way that watering won't create waterfalls down below!

great, but blooms are better highlighted when balanced by distinct foliage. To make the math easier, try to allow for equal numbers of vining and flowering plants.

- ◆ When using annuals, select ones that will really 'pop' and make a statement. Have fun with them!
- ◆ Don't rush the weather! Wait until the May Long Weekend (or until nighttime temperatures are above 10°C) to set summer plants out.
- ◆ Try to combine plants with similar growth habits, so that one does not overtake them all!
- ◆ Put casters underneath heavy containers so that they can be moved to take advantage of the sun, or shifted out of the way if you need space.
- ◆ Feed feed feed! The biggest difference between gorgeous, full baskets at the end of the season and tired, sad ones is nutrition.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to pinch! Removing spent blooms as they finish and cutting back plants to encourage a bushy form will help keep your container looking bountiful.

### Best Bets for Containers

In theory, almost anything can be grown in a container, but some plants certainly do better than others. Remember to include bark mulch in the soil mix for any year-round plants. Here are some general suggestions:

**Trees & Shrubs:** Select dwarf varieties and plants that have non-aggressive root systems. Japanese maples, cedar hedging, yew trees and evergreen cotoneasters are good candidates and make great privacy screens too.

**Perennials:** Select compact varieties, ones that do not spread via runners and plants that put on a show for a long season, i.e. long blooming or with evergreen or semi-evergreen foliage. Rudbeckia, lavender, heuchera, euphorbia, ivy and ornamental grasses are fantastic options.

**Annuals:** Almost anything goes for annuals! Refer to the tips above for selection advice.

Remember that we truly have four growing seasons in our area, so annuals can be freshened up year round to keep your container looking great.

**Fruit Trees & Small Fruits:** Again, dwarf varieties are best and there are several columnar options available these days. Berry plants do well in half-barrel containers, but select container specific varieties, such as 'Brazelberries', where possible. Strawberries can be grown in hanging baskets!

**Vegetables:** One of the most common questions we are asked is "What veggies can I grow in pots?" Any variety labeled as a container type is ideal, just don't crowd them. Some of our picks...

*Beans:* Bush types

*Celery:* 'Utah', 'Tango'

*Cucumbers:* Bush types, 'Patio Snacker'

*Eggplant:* Any

*Kale:* Any. Great for cool season plantings!

*Leeks & Scallions:* Any

*Lettuce & Spinach:* Ideal for containers. 'Simply Salad' blends allow for multiple harvests in one season!

*Peas:* Bush types, 'Peas-in-a-Pot', 'Little Marvel'

*Peppers:* All do well, just watch your watering. Hot peppers like 'Chenzo' offer ornamental value too!

*Root Vegetables* such as beets, carrots, kohlrabi, parsnips, potatoes, radishes as well as onions, can be grown in containers, but you must ensure the roots can grow deeply.

*Squash (Summer):* Bush Zucchini

*Squash (Winter):* These should be grown in-ground or in raised beds. Bush Acorns and the new 'Burpee Butterbush' (butternut) will do well in large containers.

*Swiss Chard:* Types like 'Bright Lights' offer lovely colour to containers.

*Tomatoes:* Bush types, 'Window Box Roma', 'Mega Bite'. 'Tumbler' & 'Tumbling Tom's are great in hanging baskets! For traditional tomatoes, choose Determinate types over Indeterminate types.



10015 Young Rd. Chilliwack, BC, V2P 4V4 Ph:604.792.6612  
 www.mintergardening.com @MinterGardening  
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## Container Size

Simply put, use as large a container as possible, a minimum of 30cm (12") in diameter with drainage holes in the bottom. The volume of soil is important for root development and moisture retention, so you'll need depth as well as diameter. As a rule of thumb, a half wine barrel is about as small as you can go for trees and shrubs, and a 25 litre (7 gallon) pot is the minimum for traditional tomatoes, squash and cucumbers. Lettuce can be grown in a 25cm (10") pot. There are many more container appropriate varieties on the market nowadays, however, so for these specifically identified types you may be able to get away with something slightly smaller.

For year-round planters, look for frost resistant containers, wood or heavy plastic blends. Pots made of clay and most ceramics will likely crack their first year, especially with wet soil. All containers should be protected with N'Sulate fabric during the colder months regardless as plants in containers 'lose a zone' of hardiness during winter. \*Please refer to our 'Planting Guide & Guarantee' regarding our return policy for nursery and perennial plants in containers.

## Soil

Soil is critical to success; don't use bargain specials or garden soil. A good-quality sterilized soil will drain well and retain the right amount of moisture. Some folks like to mix in moisture-retaining 'hydro-gels', which absorb water then release it back into the soil as needed. They expand up to 30% when watered, so remember to factor this in when potting up. For pots that contain perennials and shrubs, mix about 30% fine bark mulch (fir or hemlock) into the soil. This will ensure the root systems do not get water-logged during wet periods. Fruit and vegetable containers should have composted organics (manure and compost) added for valuable nutrients. Do not mix fertilizer into the soil, but remember to use liquid transplanter when planting to give your plants a strong start. When filling your containers, don't pack the soil

too tightly. Tap the container gently a couple of times to let the soil settle in. Remember to leave the level of planted soil slightly lower than the lip of your container so that water has a chance to be absorbed and won't run right out.

## Watering

Water your containers in the morning rather than late in the day. Plants absorb moisture more efficiently in the period of time just as the sun rises. Water the soil, rather than the whole plant. Putting water on the foliage can lead to fungus problems such as blight or mildew, which have ruined many crops over the years. Water thoroughly and deeply to encourage roots to reach down for the moisture. Watering too frequently creates shallow, more fragile root systems. If you want to have a carefree container garden, set up a drip irrigation system connected to a timer.

How can you tell when to water? Lift the container. Freshly planted containers should be given a good soak, ideally with warm water. After that, however, only water containers when they are slightly dry and thus somewhat light to lift. Some plants do prefer more dry or more moist conditions, so these guidelines will change based on what you have chosen to plant.

## Feeding

Plants in containers require more frequent applications of nutrients. Whether you choose to stay organic or use a mix of both organic and chemical, you should fertilize at least weekly during the active growing season. Once you have your plants in place, top dress with slow release 14-14-14 fertilizer. This will help feed every time you water. Ideally, feed with a liquid fertilizer once a week as well, and this is where you can use plant specific fertilizers (i.e. Fruit & Berry if you've planted a blueberry).

## Troubleshooting

If your container dries out or is overwatered, under-watered or otherwise stressed, it may still be possible to bring it back from the brink.

- ◆ Soak the soil and roots with a fungicide if there are rot problems caused by over watering
- ◆ Allow the plants to dry out more between waterings, but mist the foliage
- ◆ Cut back all unhappy plants
- ◆ Use diluted 20-20-20 as a foliar spray to encourage new growth

## Tips

- ◆ Plant with 'Thrill, Fill & Spill' in mind. This motto of master gardener Kathy Pufahl means that, to build an aesthetically pleasing, layered container, select a thrilling focal point plant (and place it in the center), fill the area at its base with plants that have an upright or mounded habit, and finish it all off with trailing plants near the edges so that they will spill down the sides.
- ◆ Choose your planting colour scheme. Even if you're happy with a riot of colour, spend a moment thinking about what you want your end result to be. Warm tones include reds, oranges and yellows. Cool tones are purples, blues, pinks and greens. Colours opposite each other on the colour wheel are striking. Monochromatic plantings are calming. Analogous plantings are the most powerful, using colours that are adjacent to each other on the colour wheel.
- ◆ Plan year-round. Use a blend of nursery, perennial and annual plants to provide colour and interest each season. You can also accent each season with items such as pine cones, gourds, Easter Egg picks etc.
- ◆ When placing your plants, decide which is the front and which is the back. Most plants have a side that is most attractive. Don't be afraid to pinch plants back to encourage them to bush out a bit.
- ◆ Include a few accent foliage plants. Flowers are