



## Container Gardening Basics

### **Soils:**

• Use a commercial potting soil. These are sterile and will provide a good balance between water-holding capacity and aeration. For hanging pots and small pots that dry quickly, try using a soil mix that has water retaining granules or mix the granules into your own potting soil according to label directions.

### **Designing and Plantings:**

- Make sure your chosen container or pot has drainage holes. This is essential. You can cover drainage holes with old pot shards, cut up pantyhose, or screen material in order to prevent soil loss through drainage holes.
- Choose plants with the same light requirements - ranging from full sun to shade.
- Choose plants with the same watering requirements - ranging from constantly moist to dry.
- Work with 3 colors of flower blooms at the most, or shades of one color for a more formal look.
- Work different foliage textures into your arrangement. Fern-like textures add softness. Bold foliage can add structure or provide a foil to softer plants. Avoid using plants with all the same texture.
- Generally, the height of the arrangement should be roughly equal to or greater than the height of the pot. The idea here to ensure that arrangements are not dwarfed by the pot.
- Consider the background against which the container is placed. Try to make sure that plants and background contrast each other rather than blend in. Also, think about the background color when choosing your flower colors to ensure that they complement each other.
- Use different colors foliage. A variegated foliage lightens and provides contrast. Burgundy, blue, and golden-leaved plants provide color that can complement or contrast against blooms.
- For year-round interest containers, use an evergreen plant (i.e. dwarf hinoki cypress) or a plant with striking winter branches (i.e. contorted filbert, Japanese maple) for a central accent. Incorporate a few other evergreen fillers and trailers, then add in annuals for colorful blooms. Including bulbs in your pot will extend the season of color.
- Set plants so that the final soil level will come up to about an inch and a half from the pot rim.
- Water thoroughly after planting to eliminate air pockets in the container. Add more soil if needed to cover exposed rootballs. You may need to water the pot two or three times initially in order to thoroughly wet the soil.

### **Maintaining:**

- Don't forget to feed. Container plantings require regular fertilizing, and annuals can certainly use a boost after the first round of bloom. Osmocote (a slow-release granule) or Miracle-Gro (a water-soluble quick feed fertilizer) are equally recommended. Avoid feeding when containers are dry. Water first, then feed.
- Keep your container looking nice by deadheading dead or dying flowers and trimming off old or dead stems and foliage. This keeps the plant from going to seed and encourages more blooms.
- Most insect damage can be controlled with insecticidal soap or horticultural oil. However, it's a good idea to identify the insect before you treat the plants making sure you have the product that is appropriate for the pest. You can bring in bagged samples to the nursery for i.d.
- Containers require more watering through the summer than they needed in spring. Check your containers regularly to prevent them from drying out beyond repair. You can ascertain moisture levels by sticking your forefinger to the second knuckle into the soil in the pot. If the soil is dry, it's time to water. It's a good idea to note which plants in your container are good indicators of a dry pot (i.e. petunias are often the first to wilt). Additionally, it's better to water and feed in the morning or evening - avoid it during the heat of the day. Try to keep water from splashing all over the foliage in order to reduce disease problems.



# Plants For Containers

This list is definitely not comprehensive but is a good start if you're looking for options for your containers. There are some repeats because some plants can do double duty depending on the size of the container or ability to tolerate different sun exposures. For example, in smaller containers, coleus can be a tall central accent while in large containers it can be used as filler. If you are unfamiliar with a plant and you have Internet access, try doing a search for it. Some search engines have searches based on images and can be a quick and easy way to get a look at a plant. Lastly, some plants that bloom have not been listed as bloomers due to limited bloom times. The blooms should be considered bonuses but should not be relied upon as a focal element in a design.

## Full Sun Container Plants:

**TALL, CENTRAL ACCENT PLANTS:** coleus, angelonia, dracaena spikes, Hawaiian snow bush, *Perilla* 'Magilla', artemisia, grasses, fennel, millet grass, tropical hibiscus, canna lily, patio tree rose, angel's trumpet, flowering maple, dwarf banana, dwarf bamboo, New Zealand flax (*phormium*), Harry Lauder's walking stick, purple-leafed filbert, black-eyed susan vine (with support)

**EVERGREEN CENTRAL ACCENT PLANTS:** columnar cypress and juniper, arborvitae, Hinoki false cypress, Red Star false cypress, nandina 'Moonbay' (also 'Gulf Stream', and 'Compacta'), boxwood, euonymus

**BLOOMERS THAT ARE FILLERS:** bougainvillea, dragonwing begonias, angelonia, strawflower, lantana, verbena, nicotiana, nierembergia, cleome, baby's breath, marguerite daisy, Blue Daze *evolvulus*, Mexican heather, brachyscome, osteospermum daisy, Mona Lavender *plectranthus*, petunias, sanvitalia, pansies (for fall/winter/early spring), geranium, Diamond Frost euphorbia, Supertunias, Million Bells, nicotiana, ornamental peppers, salvia, pentas

**OTHER FILLERS:** cleome, sedums, variegated Swedish ivy, curry plant (*helichrysum*), coleus, ornamental grasses, dusty miller, purple heart, purple basil, fennel, purple-leaf sage, parsley (for fall and early spring), croton, 'Firepower' nandina, Persian shield

**BLOOMERS THAT TRAIL OR SPILL:** portulaca, brachyscome, trailing verbena, trailing petunias, nierembergia, Blue Casbah morning glory, nasturtium (spring-early summer color), fan flower, blue lobelia, Callie bells

**OTHER TRAILING PLANTS:** *plectranthus*, purple heart, licorice plant (*helichrysum petiolare*), silver diondra, thyme, oregano, sweet potato vine, variegated wintercreeper, sedums

## Shade Container Plants:

**TALL, CENTRAL ACCENT PLANTS:** dracaena spikes, coleus, elephant ears, Moonlight philodendron, Japanese maple, anthurium, upright ferns (such as Kimberly Queen), Chinese evergreen (not evergreen here)

**EVERGREEN CENTRAL ACCENT PLANTS:** camellia, columnar Japanese plum yew, dwarf aucuba

**BLOOMERS THAT ARE FILLERS:** begonias, impatiens, torenia, fuchsia, pulmonaria, Lenten rose (late winter/early spring bloom; evergreen)

**OTHER FILLERS:** coleus, coral bells (*heuchera*), ornamental clover, asparagus fern and other ferns, purple wood spurge (and other euphorbias, some evergreen), Chinese evergreen (not evergreen here), monkey grass (*liriope*), black mondo grass, hostas, carex grass, caladium, foamflower, foamy bells (*heucherella*)

**BLOOMERS THAT TRAIL OR SPILL:** bacopa, torenia

**OTHER TRAILING/SPILLING PLANTS:** lamium, vinca vine, pothos, creeping raspberry, carex grass, ivy, creeping jenny

## Part Sun to Part Shade Containers:

**TALL CENTRAL ACCENT PLANTS:** dracaena spikes, Hawaiian snow bush, coleus, *Perilla* 'Magilla', peace lily, homalomena, calathea, elephant ears, dracaena 'Marginata', Japanese maple

**EVERGREEN CENTRAL ACCENT PLANTS:** Hinoki false cypress, Red Star false cypress, arborvitae

**BLOOMERS THAT ARE FILLERS:** geraniums, New Guinea impatiens, blue daisy (*felicia*), ageratum, heliotrope, bacopa, begonias, baby's breath, ageratum, peace lily, Gerber daisy

**OTHER FILLERS:** asparagus fern and other ferns, alternanthera, artemisia, variegated Swedish ivy, nierembergia, croton, dumbcane, coral bells (*heuchera*), monkey grass (*liriope*), black mondo grass, Persian shield, foamflower, foamy bells (*heucherella*)

**BLOOMERS THAT TRAIL OR SPILL:** ivy geranium, brachyscome, blue lobelia

**OTHER TRAILING/SPILLING PLANTS:** silver diondra, vinca vine, polka dot plant, creeping raspberry, carex grass, creeping jenny, variegated wintercreeper