



Container Gardens - Simple and Perfect

Planting spectacular container gardens is simply a matter of combining two elements: great plant material and quality soil and amenities- our beautiful Northwest summer will take care of the rest. When choosing plant material, look for a combination of different growing characteristics. Select plants that grow upright in a compact area, like geraniums or heliotrope and those that cascade down the side of the pot. Add in some trailing foliage, like sweet potato vine or vinca to create contrast with your flowering varieties. You'll need enough plants to fill the entire surface of the container. This is an instance, when more is better.

Your pot sets the stage for the coming show of beautiful blooming color, so select it with this in mind. See your container as an investment more than an expense as it will be with you for years to come. After your summer flowers have faded your pot will remain. Select a pot that works harmoniously with the other elements of your exterior. Patio surfaces, house color, patio cushions should all be considered. Quality counts here as well. A good frost resistant pot can be left out year round, giving you the opportunity to change it seasonally. Even Christmas shouldn't be overlooked as an opportunity to showcase your investment. Put a few sprigs of holly into the soil for weeks of holiday cheer.

Plan your container garden by choosing 1 larger vertical plant for the center of the pot. This creates the central focus and gives the height you need to create balance and utilize the greatest amount of space. Certain grasses or dwarf conifers work well in this role. You should then select at least 4 each of four different varieties of plants for the area surrounding your central plant. Depending on the pot size, the center plant can be a 6" pot size, the surrounding plants are usually smaller-- 2 - 4 inch pot sizes. Color is star the of your container garden. Nurseries carry 100's of varieties of annuals in an array of colors and variations. When choosing your plants for color, group them all together and stand back to fine tune your selection. Colors should compliment,

and support each other, not compete for center stage. A monochromatic container garden can create great visual impact, providing the textures and shapes of the plants are varied. Summer annuals are most popular for color and are relatively inexpensive, while perennials, foliage and grasses will continue growing into the fall and winter months.

Once you have chosen your plant material, it is time to head to the garden center for your soil and amenities. Using the right quality products will determine the overall success of your container garden. Organic soil is popular for good reason. Not only is it earth friendly, but it is created to optimize the growing potential in this natural environment. Include a starter fertilizer on your list of 'must have' gardening amenities. Starter fertilizers, ease all plants into their new home by supporting healthy root development. Many a green thumb has been born, from the use of starter fertilizers. Keep it on hand for any kind of planting or transplanting you do in your garden. Lastly, no plant will thrive without fertilizers. Time release fertilizers are excellent for container gardens, but don't expect it to be all you'll need. A good water soluble fertilizer will be necessary throughout the growing season and as often as every other watering is not unusual. Basically, the more you feed your container garden, the more it will reward your efforts with bountiful beauty. All soils and fertilizers are not created equal. Ask your nursery professional for their recommendations. Remember, your Nurseryman/woman is a gardener just like you and me. Years of successful container planting yields experienced and professional advice.

Now that your shopping list is completed you're ready to plant. Fill your pot with soil, stopping 6-8 inches below the rim of the pot. Mix in a handful or two of starter fertilizer and the recommended quantity of time release fertilizer. 'Preview' your design by placing your plants on top of the soil while still in their plastic pots. Take a systematic approach to creating your container garden. Place your taller focal point plant in the center. Now choose one variety of plant and space it out evenly along the outer edge of the pot. Think of it as the spokes on a wheel. Each plant variety that is added should be methodically placed in this circular pattern, spaced evenly apart and in same relation to those surrounding it. It may seem an uninspired approach, but the end result of this patterning will create a spectacular and professional looking finished product. Once you are happy with your design add a bit more soil and begin planting. Plants like to be cozy, so don't worry about crowding. Snug plantings encourage prolific blooming. Add soil as you go and press down and around each plant, being sure there's plenty of soil for those roots to grow into. Water is the final step in planting and aside from regular pinching and fertilizing; it is the only care you'll need to perform from here forward. Mother Nature will do the rest.