

Suggested Container Plants

Shade Plants

Begonia	Hosta
Caladium	Impatiens
Fuschia	Torenia

Sun Plants

Cactus & Succulents	Hibiscus
Canna	Marigold
Dahlia	Nasturtium
Geranium	Petunia

Foliage Plants

Coleus	Licorice Plant
Ferns	Ornamental Grasses
Heuchera	Sweet Potato Vine

Fragrant Plants

Heliotrope	Scented Geraniums
Lavender	Stock
Rose	Sweet Pea

Edible Plants

Blueberries	Patio Tomatoes
Bush Cucumber	Peppers
Herbs	Salad Greens

Butterfly Plants

Aster	Pentas
Butterfly Weed	Verbena
Lantana	Zinnia

For more information on gardening
please visit:
[http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state/
horticulture/index.php](http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state/horticulture/index.php)

or
call University of Illinois Extension
Knox County Office
309-342-5108

Other information brochures can be found
online at [http://web.extension.illinois.edu/
hkmw/hort.html](http://web.extension.illinois.edu/hkmw/hort.html)

Developed and Written by
Knox County Master Gardeners
University of Illinois Extension
April 2011



University of Illinois ~U.S. Department of
Agriculture ~ Local Extension Councils
Cooperating

University of Illinois Extension provides
equal opportunities in programs and
employment.

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION
HENDERSON, KNOX, MCDONOUGH
AND WARREN COUNTIES**

Knox County Office
180 S. Soangetaha Rd. Suite 108
Galesburg, IL 61401

Phone: 309-342-5108
Fax: 309-342-1768
Email: uiemg-knox@illinois.edu

Container Gardening



Garden Tips from Knox County Master Gardeners



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

Gardening in containers allows you to garden in limited space and is easier for the elderly or those with physical limitations. It also allows you to compensate for unsuitable growing conditions and move plants as needs and conditions change.

Location

Place containers where the light and temperature requirements of the plants will be met. Avoid areas where containers might be knocked over by wind, pets, or children. Buildings and paved areas can reflect excess heat, causing leaf burn in some plants. Consider where hanging baskets will drip.

Choosing a Container

A container can be anything that has drainage holes and will hold enough soil to support the plant's root system. Many materials are available—common ones include plastic, terra cotta, glazed pottery, synthetics, metal, wood, and recycled objects such as wagons and boots.

Porous materials such as terra cotta require more frequent watering and will need winter protection. Dark colored or metal pots absorb heat which can damage roots. Heavier containers are more stable but could be a problem if the container will be moved or placed on balconies or decks.

Choose containers that will enhance the appearance of the plant, as well as complement the surrounding structures and landscape.

Soil

Commercial mixes are readily available and easy to use. You can also make your own mix, using equal parts peat, perlite or vermiculite, and good garden soil if desired. Never use garden soil by itself. It is heavy, compacts, and has poor drainage. Compost can be added to either homemade or purchased soil mix.

Choosing Plants

All plants growing in one container should have the same cultural requirements. Consider the mature size of the plants when choosing containers and companion plants. Use a variety of shapes, textures, and colors.

Include tall or accent plants (thrillers), mounding plants (fillers), and trailing plants (spillers). This can be accomplished in a single container or by grouping several containers together. Place taller plants in the center if the container will be viewed from all sides; otherwise place them towards the back of the container or grouping.

Putting the Container Together

Start with a clean container. Moisten soil-less mix with warm water and fill container. Arrange plants on surface of the soil to make sure they are positioned the way you want them. Remove plants from pots, gently loosen roots, and place at the same level they were growing in the original pots. Water thoroughly.

Plants can be placed closer together in a container than they would be in the garden, but will require more water and fertilizer. Using more or larger plants will yield quicker results but also involve higher costs.

For very large, deep containers, you can add a filler (milk jugs, crushed aluminum cans, or non-biodegradable Styrofoam pieces) to the bottom 1/4 to 1/3 of the container. This reduces weight and requires less soil. Leave room on top for at least 20" of potting mix to allow room for root development.

Caring for Containers

Water: Watering frequency will depend on container material, location of pots, time of year, plants grown, and stage of growth, but all containers will need to be watered more often than plants grown in the ground. If the top inch of soil feels dry, water thoroughly until water runs freely out of the drainage holes.

If the soil becomes so dry it pulls away from the side of the pot, water will flow out without moistening the soil. When this happens, partially submerge the base of the container in water until the surface of the soil becomes moist due to water uptake through the drainage holes. Remove and allow excess water to drain away.

Fertilizer: Container plants will need more fertilizer, as watering flushes out the nutrients contained in the soil mix. Slow-release fertilizer is included in many commercial mixes, or can be added to commercial or homemade mixes. Liquid fertilizer can be used instead of or as a supplement to slow-release fertilizer. Use a balanced formula according to package directions. **Grooming:** Cut back stems if plants become leggy, and remove spent flowers to encourage continued bloom. Remove any diseased or damaged portion of the plant.

Problems: Healthy plants are more insect and disease resistant, so proper growing conditions and maintenance will help ensure healthy containers. Examine plants before purchasing. Be observant - problems are easier to deal with when caught early.

Winter Care

Annuals - Remove plant and all or part of the soil. If plants were healthy, the soil can be re-used next year.

Tropicals and Tender Perennials - Bring plants indoors and overwinter after checking for potential insect and disease problems.

Hardy Perennials - Treat as an annual and discard, or remove from the container and transplant into the garden. If you want to overwinter, you will need to prevent the roots from freezing and maintain moisture in the soil. Either wrap the container and place in a protected location or sink into the ground and mulch.

Containers - Porous pots and some types of plastic need to be protected from moisture and freezing temperatures. Bring indoors or into a garage or shed, or turn upside down and cover with a waterproof cover.