

THE OUTSIDER

Illinois Extension Horticulture serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark



CONTAINER GARDENING

Raised bed gardening is a not-so new trend that offers versatility that traditional gardening doesn't. First and foremost, for Outsiders that don't have the landscape space to install a garden, container gardens offer a great option.

Containers are also ideal when garden soil conditions are not. Amended or manufactured soils are available through many local garden centers and box stores and are recommended for container gardens. Mixes specific to the type of plants growing in the container are convenient for gardeners and ideal for plant growth. Seed starting mixes are finer in texture, providing for improved seed-to-soil contact. They retain moisture while being well-drained, and provide pore space for aeration. Once seeds germinate and seedlings begin to develop, plants should be replanted into potting soil. Potting soils provide similar growing conditions for plants with a higher fertilizer analysis to meet nutrient requirements of growing plants. Specialty soils are available and designed for plants with unique requirements such as succulents, cactus, orchids, or African Violets.

When in doubt, potting soils with a slow-release fertilizer are a good bet for most plants.

For the less experienced Outsider, container gardening can be an easy way to experiment with growing. Conditions are much more controlled than in-ground gardens, set up is faster, gardens can be located nearly anywhere, and results can be enjoyed just the same as traditional gardening



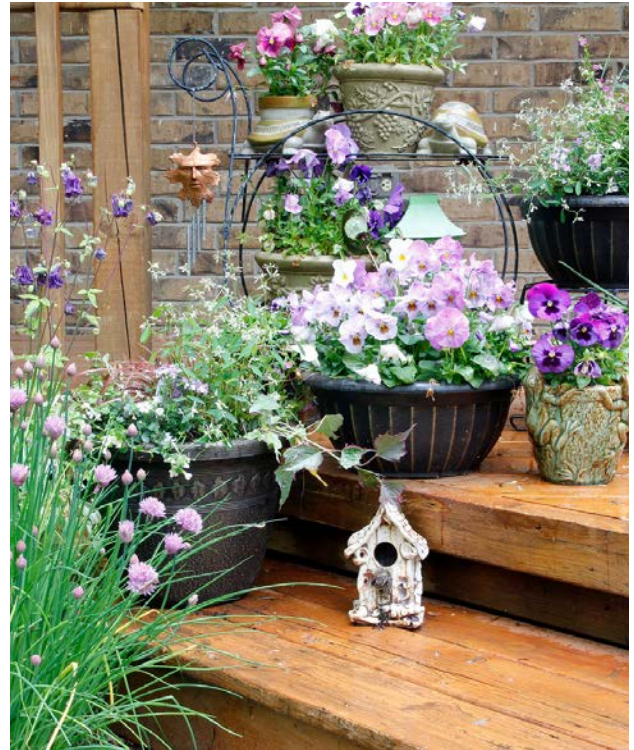
CHOOSING PLANTS

Nearly any plant available in a nursery or by seed can be grown in a container. Herbs and vegetables make great edible gardens and may be placed in a location near the kitchen for convenience. Annual flowers can provide spectacular displays of color throughout the year. Perennial plants can be overwintered in ground or in a protected shed and placed outside during the growing season.

Just like a traditional garden, plant species can be mixed in containers. Plant combinations can create visual interest and diverse harvests. To be most successful with mixed containers, choose plants that have similar moisture, light, and soil requirements. Once growing requirements have been analyzed, choosing plants is a matter of personal preference. Choosing plants with different sizes, shapes, and leaf texture can create interesting combinations. Three types of plants are recommended for creating the most visually appealing combinations: thrillers, fillers, and spillers.

Thrillers are tall plants located in the center or back of a container. As a guide, when plants are the focal point, the mature height of the thriller should be twice the height of the container for an overall proportion of one third container to two thirds plants. This proportion is reversed if the container is the focal point of the arrangement.

Fillers are mounding plants that fill in the middle ground of the container. And **spillers** are trailing plants that grow over the side of the planter.



CHOOSING CONTAINERS

Container options are nearly endless. If a container holds soil and has drainage holes, it can be used for planting. New containers may be purchased, or recycled containers can be made into garden planters. Color, shape, and size options are unlimited and can be a fun way to express personality, creativity, and upcycle containers.

It is important to keep in mind that container choice is going to influence plant selection and maintenance. Containers need to provide adequate soil volume to support root systems and plant growth. Smaller containers will support smaller plants and may require more frequent watering due to limited storage capacity. Larger containers are heavier and more challenging to move or rotate. Clay or terracotta containers can wick moisture away from soils and may require more frequent watering. Metal containers can get hot in direct sun and cause root damage.



ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Like plants in the ground, plants in containers are impacted by their surrounding environment. Prior to creating a container garden, assess the light and temperature conditions where you wish to position your container garden. Does the site receive full sun (more than 6 hours of direct sunlight each day)? Is it in heavy shade? If your container is located on or near abundant hardscape or stone, temperatures can be elevated due to radiant heat. Wind can cause containers to blow over and damage plants. Heat and wind can dry out plants and soils faster than protected, shaded locations.

Planter and site conditions shouldn't deter Outsiders from creating container gardens, rather they should help influence plant and container choice.



Container gardening can be a great alternative or addition to traditional gardening practices. With a few considerations, container gardens can be fruitful and fun for Outsiders all year long.



OUTSIDER ACTION

Try these activities to be more of an Outsider

- Learn more about "Accessible Edible Container" gardening by watching this webinar: go.illinois.edu/EdibleContainer
- Upcycle a container and plant a container garden. Explore the internet and local garden centers for ideas and plants.

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