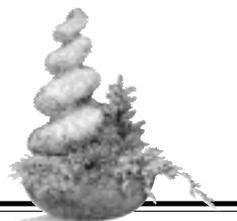


Gardening in Containers



Container gardening has exploded in popularity in recent years, and for good reason. This method can give all gardeners the opportunity to bring color and beauty into their lives, regardless of the size of the space they have to work with. Container gardens are as lovely and effective framing an impressive entrance to a large country estate as they are on a small balcony high above the city street.

Containers

Sometimes choosing the container is like setting the mood — a beautiful glazed ceramic, down to earth terra-cotta, shabby chic galvanized buckets. Behnke Nurseries has a beautiful collection of containers for you to choose from, in materials as varied as terra-cotta, ceramic, metal, molded resin, concrete, and plastic. However, you need not be limited to store-bought containers. Attics and flea markets are prime hunting grounds for possible containers. Galvanized buckets, whiskey barrels, and old wooden troughs are only a few possibilities. Use your imagination.

When choosing your container keep in mind “when” you plan to use it. If you are a spring through fall container gardener, the sky the limit. At the end of the season, clean out your containers and store them for the next season. If you are looking forward to a year round container, keep in mind, only certain containers can make it through the freeze and thaw of the winter. Porous containers like clay and ceramic may fracture. Thin materials like metals and plastics may not insulate the plants’ roots properly. Concrete and wood work well and lining thin containers with insulation may help. Size is also a factor. Larger containers will be less likely to freeze and thaw constantly.

Other considerations are watering and drainage. Small containers are fine, but require more frequent watering than larger containers. Small containers should be checked daily. Proper drainage in all containers is a must. To keep the drainage holes from getting blocked with soil use a layer of gravel, broken pottery shards, or even a piece of landscape fabric in the bottom of your container. Pot-feet will also keep the container from collecting soil and debris beneath it that could block the drainage holes.

Planting Media

Ordinary garden soil is not recommended for container plantings. It is generally too heavy and can bring with it weed seeds and fungi. Instead, a commercially prepared potting mix is preferred, as it is specially formulated to provide excellent drainage and optimum moisture retention. Fine gravel or sand can be added to the mix if you plan on using plants that require even better drainage, such as cacti or alpine.

Unless the bag your potting mix comes in states it has fertilizer mixed in, you will need to incorporate a *slow release* fertilizer like Osmocote® to ensure good growth and flower production. This fertilizer may only be reapplied every 4-6 months. So, for optimum results, also supplement with a weekly application of a water-soluble organic fertilizer.

Plants

Today, the selection of annuals for containers is enormous, but you need not limit your choices to annuals. With a little effort and planning your container plantings can be beautiful year round. Spring bulbs, perennials, grasses, shrubs and even small trees can all be incorporated into container plantings, for adding even more color, texture and structure.

Many gardeners follow an easy pattern when planting containers. This is "The Anatomy of a Container Garden" — usually guaranteeing a beautiful planting.....

The Anatomy of a Container Garden

1. The Thriller

This is usually the "head" plant that has an interesting shape, bold flowers or, big leaves. It should add vertical interest and say "WOW" to passersby. The thriller will take up position in the center of the pot. Grasses, dracena spikes, cannas, banana plants, tall ferns, colocasias, tall coleus are just a few examples. Most of the time this is the first plant picked, since it is the "stand out" in the pot.

2. The Fillers

Just as the name suggests these are the "body" of the container garden. They fill in around the thriller and usually compliment or contrast it in color or texture. Most of the time

these are flowering annuals (impatiens, petunias, geraniums, etc.) or perennials (heuchera , hosta, low grasses, etc.).

3. The Spiller

These are the “feet” of the container garden, anchoring it to the ground. In addition, the spiller will soften the edge of the pot and again help unify the composition through color or texture. Included in this group are trailing vinca, licorice plant, bocapa, sweet potato vine, creeping dusty millers, lysimachia.

Container gardens can be practical as well as beautiful. Vegetables and herbs make excellent container plants (for example: a tomato plant with basil and oregano at the base). A few planters on a sunny deck, filled with herbs, salad greens, tomatoes, peppers and even perhaps a dwarf fruit tree, can provide many delicious meals come harvest time.

When combining different plants in a single container, keep in mind their growth rate, and potential size at maturity, and try to balance each plant’s sunlight and moisture requirements.

Maintenance

Container gardens are relatively easy to create, but do require consistent maintenance. During cool weather, you can check to see if the containers need watering every other day or so, but once the heat of summer hits, containers will often need to be watered once or even twice a day. It is difficult to match the growth rate of all the plants in a container, and ultimately some plants will begin to outgrow others. Clipping and pruning will keep the plants in bounds and will encourage denser growth and increased flower production. Seasonal plants such as pansies, mums and bulbs will need to be replaced with more appropriate plants as the seasons change.

Container gardens can be very fun. They provide up-close interaction with your plants. They also make a great beginner gardens for people just starting to dabble in the gardening world or for children who want to learn about and explore nature.

Experience • Explore • Enjoy



Garden Centers
Beltsville, MD
(301) 937-1100
Potomac, MD
(301) 983-9200



www.Behnkes.com

Behnke Florist
Potomac, MD
(301) 983-4400

