

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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Gardening in Containers Bring Flowers Closer to Enjoy

Enjoy flowering plants on the deck, patio, or near the front door to welcome guests.

Planting them in containers makes this possible. Container gardens also fit on apartment or condo balconies. Many plants and types of containers makes growing in containers fun.

Numerous annual flowering plants are suitable for containers receiving full sun. These include: calibrachoa (Million Bells® or Superbells®), geranium, marigold, *Mercardonia* 'Gold Dust', Mountain Frost®, periwinkle (vinca), petunias of many types, SunPatients®, Supertunias®, Surfina® trailing petunias, Wave® petunias, sun coleus, spreading summer snapdragons, tall summer snapdragons, and ornamental sweet potato vines with chartreuse or nearly black leaves. Remember, annuals are plants that live for only one year, but they make a big impact in the landscape.

Other annuals such as diascia, licorice plant, nemesia, sun coleus, and vinca vine will grow in full sun to part shade. Wax or fibrous-rooted begonias, caladiums, Rex begonia, Dragon Wing® begonia, New Guinea impatiens, and coleus, that are not sun tolerant, grow in partially shaded to shaded locations.

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Even though ferns do not flower, they are beautiful plants. The Boston fern requires shade to prevent it from scorching and turning brown under hot conditions. On the other hand, ‘Macho’ and ‘Kimberly Queen’ ferns tolerate the sun. Plant ferns in pots or hanging baskets. ‘Macho’ fern has big and bold foliage while ‘Kimberly Queen’ has fine textured foliage. The ferns can be wintered over but they must be taken inside before the first frost in the fall and kept indoors with light available during the winter.

Many different types of annual plants can be used in hanging baskets. Plants that trail over the sides of the basket help to hide the pot and are very dramatic. Calibrachoa (Million Bells® or Superbells®), bacopa, cascading petunias, ivy geraniums, moss rose, Supertunia® petunias, trailing sun coleus, trailing periwinkle, verbena, and wave petunias, are annuals that prefer to grow in full sun and tolerate a couple of hours of partial shade during the day. Impatiens is an annual that prefers to grow in full shade but will tolerate a couple of hours of morning sun. These plants also make a nice addition to window boxes.

Spike plants are used to provide height in containers. They are green and some are reddish, but they do not bloom. In addition, Graceful Grasses® purple fountain grass adds height and season-long interest. Other very tall green plants include Graceful Grasses® Prince Tut™ and King Tut®, which have the common name of Egyptian papyrus. For a smaller container, Graceful Grasses® Queen Tut™ spreads 18 inches and reaches about 18 inches tall.

Perennials can be planted within the same container as annuals too. Perennials live from year to year. In order to keep them for the next year, the roots of the plant must be protected

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from freezing during the winter. This can be accomplished by placing the pot in a protected area or by burying the pot in the ground.

Coral bells (*Heuchera*) are attractive perennials when combined with other plants because of the variety of leaf colors and patterns available. One of my favorite foliage colors in coral bells is bright chartreuse green. What an eye-catcher in a container! The daylily ‘Stella d’Oro’ is a nice perennial to grow in containers in full sun. Smaller hostas grow well in pots in the shade.

Containers are available in many sizes, forms, and shapes. They can be made of clay, redwood, cedar wood, or plastic. Also consider using half barrels, cut-off milk jugs, or window boxes. Never use containers that have held products that would be toxic to plants or people. Wood for use around vegetable plants should never be treated with creosote or pentachlorophenol (Penta) wood preservatives. These may be toxic to plants and harmful to people as well.

Make sure that the container has drainage holes in the bottom so the plant roots will not stand in water, which may cause them to rot and die. A saucer placed under the container collects the water, but remember to empty it to avoid keeping the plants too wet or allowing mosquitoes to develop.

Use a commercially prepared potting soil mix to put in the containers. Using only garden soil is not recommended because it does not allow proper drainage. The commercially prepared mix should allow water to drain easily. If it is too fine, the mix holds too much moisture and causes the plant roots to rot.

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Pay particular attention to watering container gardens. Container soils can dry out very quickly, especially on a concrete patio in full sun. Water when the soil feels dry, which may be several times each week as the plant grows. However, the soil should not be soggy or have water standing on top. When watering, add water until it runs out of the drainage holes. This helps to prevent a buildup of salts in the soil from the fertilizer.

Fertilize ornamental plants once every two to three weeks with a soluble plant fertilizer according to the label directions.

When starting vegetables from seed in a pot, the first fertilizer application is made three weeks after the plants have two sets of leaves. Then repeat once a week using a soluble plant fertilizer at one-half strength according to the label directions.

For more information about gardening in containers, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

Many of the plants in the article are available at locally owned garden centers and nurseries.

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