

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

	University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment Cooperative Extension Service
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## Enjoy Gardening in Containers with Annual Flowering Plants

Container gardens fit on the patio, deck, near the front door, and on balconies. They bring hours of joy and are easy to plant. A variety of plants and containers make growing in containers fun.

It may be hard to choose, but numerous annual flowering plants are suitable for containers receiving full sun. These include: calibrachoa (million bells or Superbells®), Calitunia®, 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 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, which are not sun tolerant, grow in partially shaded to shaded locations. Impatiens is an annual that prefers to grow in full shade but will tolerate a couple of hours of morning sun.

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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, bold foliage, while ‘Kimberly Queen’ has fine-textured foliage. The ferns can be wintered over but 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 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. These plants also make a nice addition to window boxes.

Spike plants, available in green and reddish varieties, provide height in containers without blooms. 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 option, Graceful Grasses® Queen Tut™ spreads 18 inches and reaches about 18 inches tall.

Perennials can be planted within the same container as annuals. Perennials live from year to year. To keep them for the next year, the roots must be protected 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.

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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. 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 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 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. Place a saucer under the container to collect 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.

Pay particular attention to watering container gardens. Container soils can dry out 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

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standing on top. When watering, add water until it runs out the drainage holes of the pot. 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.

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

## **Annette's Tip:**

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

When daffodils (*Narcissus*) become crowded and the number of blooms decreases, they should be divided. The best time to divide them is after the foliage has died completely, which may be in June. They can be divided in July and August too. Remember to allow the foliage to die back naturally.

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