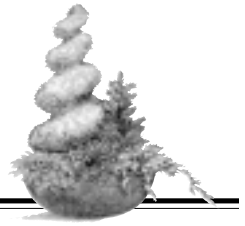


Gardening in Containers



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

Behnke Nurseries has a beautiful collection of containers for you to choose from, in materials as varied as terra-cotta, metal, wood, and plastic. 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. Small containers are fine, but require more frequent watering than larger containers. The most important consideration in choosing a container is insuring proper drainage for your plants. A layer of gravel or broken pottery shards will keep the drainage hole from getting blocked with soil.

Planting Media

Ordinary garden soil is not recommended for container plantings. Instead, a commercially prepared potting mix is preferred, as it is specially formulated to provide excellent drainage and optimum moisture retention. These mixes are usually soilless, and contain a mixture of peat moss, perlite, and vermiculite. 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 alpiners.

Soilless mixes are generally not very fertile, so you will need to incorporate a slow release fertilizer, such as Osmocote®, to ensure good growth and flower production. Slow release fertilizers need to be reapplied every 3-6 months. For optimum results, supplement with a weekly application of a soluble organic fertilizer.

Plants

Begonias and geraniums are a common sight in window boxes and

planters, and today's 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.

Container gardens can be practical as well as beautiful. Vegetables and herbs make excellent container plants. 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. Behnke's selection of annuals, perennials and other plants suitable for containers is growing everyday and our professional staff would be happy to help you find some beautiful plants that would best suit your needs. If you are uncomfortable designing a container planting yourself, the staff at Behnke's is always happy to offer expert advice. We will also plant your container for you.

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.

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