

Outdoor container gardening



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Question: I'm an avid gardener who just moved from a property with a large garden space to an apartment with a very small, limited garden space. I've been thinking about using containers to plant my garden but would like to know more about it. What suggestions can you offer?

Answer: Container gardening is a perfect way to grow a garden for those who live in any dwelling that offers a small, restricted amount of space.

Some people, as they age, start container gardening just because it's easier to manage. Container gardening is an excellent way to introduce the joy of gardening to young children.

When deciding which type of container to use, be creative! People use barrels, flowerpots, window boxes, plastic lined baskets, cut-off milk jugs and old wheelbarrows just to name a few. In my neighborhood, someone even used an old boat.

There are a few things to keep in mind though. First of all, select a container that is large enough to hold all the soil plus will have adequate room for the plant size at maturity. The container you use must provide sufficient drainage. There must be at least 6-8 inches of soil in order to allow enough space for rooting.

Many people put the large, heavy containers on dollies so they can easily move the container when severe rain, hail, or strong winds are coming or when the plant needs to chase available sunlight.

When filling your containers with soil, keep these requirements in mind:

Regular garden soil is not well-suited for container



BONNIE COURTER/COURTESY PHOTO

A livestock trough used as container garden at the Discovery Garden in Roseburg.

ASK A MASTER GARDENER



gardening because it is just too heavy. Instead use garden soil that is fairly lightweight. You can purchase garden soil that is specifically formulated for container gardening, or you can make your own.

If you decide to make your own, mix one part peat moss, one part garden loam and one part clean, coarse builder's sand, and just enough slow-release balanced fertilizer based on the size of your container. In general, you will need about 1 ½ tablespoons of 10-10-10 for a 12 inch pot. If you add the

fertilizer now, you won't have to add any more fertilizer for another 8-10 weeks.

Before you actually put a single seed or transplant into the container, make sure you have cleaned it out thoroughly. If you think your plant will grow large enough to require some sort of cage or support, add them when the plants are very small to avoid root damage.

The soil in containers dries out quickly, and you will probably find yourself watering more than if your plants were in the ground. It is best to water until the water runs out the drainage holes, but keep in mind – the soil should never be left soggy. Each plant will have different watering needs based on the plant itself, the

size of the container, and the location of the container in your yard.

For instance, if your containers are on hot cement in full sun, more watering will be necessary than if your containers are on dirt in a partially shaded area. Your small containers will dry out sooner than your larger containers.

To get the watering requirements correct may take some "trial and error" on your part, but be observant and you will discover what each plant needs.

And as with every garden, you will need to check plants for evidence of insect damage and diseases. Check at least once, maybe twice a week so you can discover problems early. This is a good time to

pull out your bug identification guide to try and figure out what is nibbling on your plants. With container gardening, it is a manageable task to hand-pick any damaging bugs off your plants.

Good luck with your new adventure. I think you will find container gardening to be a satisfying way to practice your "green thumb" skills.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.