

Oct 2022

- **What kinds of ingredients should be considered when preparing for ornamental plants in a container? Please provide any hacks you may have for container gardening.**

We all like some cheer at our front doors or on our patios. There are some simple do's and don'ts when planting up containers.

When planting up a container, of course the right plant and right place is paramount.

Furthermore, as the space is limited the plants must all want the same conditions (e.g., avoid placing water-loving and drought-loving plants in the same container).

Many garden centres here close for a month around January or February. But on the island, you can find something year round that is green. This means you can plant a container up in spring, change up just some of the really spring plants that are done by summer with something more summery and again switch out the odd thing come fall or winter. It is amazing to think you can have plants popping up and bulbs when the prairies are still covered in snow!

I have had the same Alberta Spruce and Lemon Cypress and hens and chicks growing year round in some of my containers. They started small and just keep growing! Don't feel you need to buy the biggest plants for your container; they grow even over 1 season.

Some shrubs do fine in big pots and this allows for people to enjoy things like Japanese Maples, lemons, apples and bonsais to grow in smaller spaces such as patios and apartment decks.

One of the easiest ways to plant up containers is to get either a simple round container or a longer narrow/rectangular planter that is the perfect size for 1 or maybe 3 standard size pots and just deep enough that the plastic pot fits inside. Plunk the plastic pot and plant inside the bigger (but not too big) decorative pot.

Another advantage of this method is that it is suitable for areas that wouldn't take in ground plants or that are not meant to be dug up like on rock, under cedars, in water gardens or maybe you purchased a plant on sale and you need a temporary home for it.

Another use of containers is to corral an aggressive plant such as ivy, mint, or bamboo that otherwise would get away. Plus if it is aggressive it is likely to survive anything and then you won't need to replace it year after year.

You want to use a soil medium lighter than regular soil. A soilless mix or potting mix includes light ingredients such as peat moss, vermiculite, perlite and/or coco coir. The mix is sterilized and can be used for starting seeds even. As soilless is quick draining the plants don't become water logged and have air at the roots to promote growth.

Also this lighter mix might allow you to move your pot under cover when winter rains come or out of deep sun when there is a heat dome. If you are planting a container of succulents you may even want to purchase cactus or succulent mix.

Now the container- Is it going to be small or large? Plastic or pottery or some other material? Will you be eating from this container/plant? When planting up edibles in containers it should restrict you from reusing any questionable containers or fertilizers.

Plastic comes in many colours plus it tends to be lighter in weight. If you don't have to worry about the plants dying or scorching or getting too much rain or possible snow falls and can leave your pot under your covered front step say, then maybe you would prefer the timeless look of pottery and the added expense might be worth it.

I have a 5 foot long 3 foot high silver metal Behlen horse trough from Alberta. It has supplied many years of great growing conditions both in Alberta and here on the wet coast. I keep this trough against the south side of the house and have tomatoes and cukes growing in there until mid September. It doesn't get too hot and is not lined with any thing or in the shade as some websites suggest. Mid winter /January I will likely still have corn salad and radicchio so in the right spot they can last indefinitely and are big enough for serious food. I have upside down yoghurt containers and regular soil in the bottom of the trough. The plant roots should be in soilless mix.

Depending where the pot will go will determine pot size and height you need. You want to see the plant at eye level or maybe below you but you don't want to be looking at a pot when you are sitting on a bench.

When planting up your pots you may buy small and cheaper 2" trailers or mounds as they grow quickly. There are 4", 6" or all the way to a 10" pot for immediate bang.

your pot on site with the plant starts there. To determine how many plants will fit, trace an outline of the top of your pot on a piece of parchment paper or plastic bag then set various the plant pots on this to see how many plants will fit. If you are planting for a corner or front step, maybe you don't need to fill the backside as much as the front. Container grown plants may or may not survive more than 1 season. But the fact that you can change up parts of your container (s) allows one to highlight the season.

Ensure that you have space to water so that the plants and soilless are not at the very top of the pot. Otherwise, you will have a messy spot around your container and never be able to water it sufficiently.

Fertilizers and soil conditioners are needed in the small confines of a pot. Read the label. Expect that you will need to fertilize every 2 -3 weeks with a slow release organic fertilizer. Fish fertilizer is a good addition for nutrients. It is especially useful to plants that flower or produce fruit. Compost or leaf mulch as a top dressing is also always beneficial.

If your container is going to be out all summer ensure that you check daily if it needs water. Also deadhead to keep it looking and blooming well. If it is winter/rainy season, keep the container out of the rains.

Sources:

Pages 150-152 Sustainable Gardening

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