



A Container Planting Primer

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The recent quarantine because of Covid-19 may be keeping folks at home, but those who are gardeners still have plenty to do to keep them busy! Many outdoor chores have been accomplished, and now it's time to do something fun with container plantings.

If you have enough space available, a grouping of pots with different plantings always looks good. If grouping, try to use odd numbers of pots—3, 5, 7 and so on—because it looks more pleasing to the eye. One large container will also look good as focal interest. The pots do not have to be the same type or shape if grouped; tall, slender pots look good next to shorter square or round pots, so experiment with placement before plants go in.

The type of container used influences how often it will need to be watered. Terra-cotta pots are very porous and tend to dry out quickly, while glazed pots hold in more moisture. It's important to make sure that all pots have drainage holes on the bottom.

When ready to fill a container, do not use soil from your garden; it is too heavy and may contain disease pathogens and/or pests. Instead, use potting soil which can be found at any garden center or nursery. It will hold moisture while still draining well. Do not put anything but the potting soil in the pot. Don't put gravel, Styrofoam pellets or anything else on the bottom. The reason is that these materials take up room that would otherwise be filled with soil, making the pot much smaller for its plant. Also, water does not pass through a gravel layer at a container's bottom as quickly as it passes through soil, so the pot's soil will become saturated. Root rot can result because roots are not getting necessary oxygen.

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Watering containers can be a bit of a balancing act; too much or too little, and the plantings may suffer. A good method is to water containers thoroughly when the soil surface becomes dry to the touch. During the hottest part of the summer, this can mean watering at least every day. Apply water until you see it draining from the bottom; this means that moisture has reached the deepest roots. Avoid wetting foliage at the end of the day because without sunlight and warmth, it will stay wet longer, making it more susceptible to foliar diseases.

To provide plants with the food they need, adding fertilizer to the potting mix at planting time is ideal. Then give your container plantings regular doses of an organic, water-soluble fertilizer at half strength, and apply it every two to three weeks until the end of the growing season.

Give your containers a good primping every week or so, deadheading faded blossoms and removing damaged or diseased leaves and stems. When cutting off faded blooms, cut the flower stems back to a leaf node or main stem. Some plants need a total overhaul by midsummer, so shearing a plant by half is sometimes needed. The plant will recover in a couple of weeks and look refreshed again.

Container planting just another dimension of gardening, so enjoy choosing your containers and nurturing your plants!

In response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) California Department of Public Health and El Dorado County Health & Human Services guidelines, all UCCE Central Sierra El Dorado and Amador County Master Gardener public events and classes are cancelled through May 31st, 2020. Check in with us on our website for updated schedules as public health guidelines change.

We realize our public classes are valued by County residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge. Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the “Ask a Master Gardener” option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We’ll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. If you are looking for garden inspiration, while our garden is closed due to COVID-19, our website has pictures, plants lists and much more. http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see <http://ucanr.edu/master> gardener e-news.