

Container Garden for Winter Interest
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Studies have shown that flowers are stress relievers. As the days get shorter and colder, it is time to say goodbye to warm weather gardens. Though I hate cutting back my flowering plants, I can still have blooms during cooler months. Planting in containers and pots can provide a cheerful garden all year!

Planning a winter container garden is not hard. First, choose the right container. Materials that perform best in cold are wood, polyurethane, fiberglass, and metal. Plastic works but can get brittle and break. Terra cotta and glazed pots should be placed in sheltered locations as they don't tolerate freezing and thawing cycles well.

Smaller pots don't retain heat or moisture as well as larger pots. Containers should be at least fourteen inches in diameter. Plants will die if roots freeze. Potting soil is an insulation for roots, so the greater the soil volume the better the insulation. Always use a good quality potting soil for winter container gardens.

What to plant? Soil temperature in containers is cooler than ground temperature. Choose plants that are hardy for one or two zones below your zone. The USDA Plant Hardiness Zones for the Western Slopes of El Dorado County range from 9b in El Dorado Hills to 8b in Pollock Pines.

Local nurseries and big box stores have a lot of plant starts suitable for containers. Pansies and violas are always a good choice for pots, and if cared for properly they can add color for many months. A few other winter candidates for your containers are Hardy Cyclamen *Cyclamen hederifolium*, Snapdragons *Antirrhinum spp.*, Pinks *dianthus spp.*, Coral Bells *Heuchera spp.*, flowering Kale *Brassica oleracea*, and Lenten Rose *Helleborus sp.* Be sure to choose healthy plants and read the plant tag. Information regarding zone hardiness, light and water requirements as well as blooming time will be on the plant tag. Adding interesting twigs and other natural material as well as waterproof ribbon and other ornaments is always fun!

In order for roots to establish, plant containers while the outside temperature is in the mid-40s or above. Before planting, make sure your container has adequate drainage. Roots of plants in containers need moist but not soggy soil. Check the moisture level of the soil periodically during the winter months. Strong winter winds can quickly dry the soil. Don't place your container in a location where water puddles after a rainstorm. If you think the container might be in the path of heavy runoffs, then place the planter on a few bricks.

An abundance of plants can be added to your winter container garden. Growth is much slower during cooler months so plants will not fill out. Refrain from fertilizing plants during the coldest months. When plants start to show new growth, a small amount of liquid fertilizer can be applied. Adding a layer of mulch around plants helps to keep those "babies" warm and roots moist. Covering your container garden with frost cloth, newspaper, or a sheet will help to protect

the planting from an occasional forecasted hard freeze. Flowers can certainly cheer us up, so happy winter container gardening!

Master Gardener classes are offered monthly throughout the county. We have a great class today, November 9 at the Cameron Park Community Center from 9 a.m. to Noon. We will offer a class titled, Ask a Master Gardener, which will be a Q & A for the audience to chat about their garden issues with volunteers. You don't want to miss this! You can find our class schedule at: http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education_Classes/?calendar=yes&g=56698, and recorded classes on many gardening topics here: http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education/Classes/

Sherwood Demonstration Garden is open on Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m.- Noon until the end of November. We will be open December through February on the first Saturday of the month for open garden and tours. Please check our website for further information about the Sherwood Demonstration Garden and winter tours at: https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/Demonstration_Garden/

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard to answer your questions. Use the "Ask a Master Gardener" option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu or leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512. We'll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news.