

Container Gardening

By Eleanor Brown, Master Gardener

Gardening often conjures up visions of large plots filled with vegetation of all kind. Today, with many of us living in smaller spaces, those plots are small or nonexistent; yet, for many of us, the desire to garden lives on. Container gardening can fulfill this desire.

Being able to garden in a smaller space is only one of many advantages of container gardening. Containers can make very interesting 'focal points' in your garden design. Placed in just the right spot, they can draw the eye and add to the beauty of your landscape. Containers can also be used to add vertical height within your landscape.

Container gardening can solve many problems. Most of us can visualize using containers on apartment balconies or in small gardens with more patio than planting space. However, containers can also be used in the full size home garden allowing us to move a sensitive plant to a particularly sunny area then to a shaded corner as the plant may need throughout the growing season. Certain plants may do better in acid soil, while others may need particularly good drainage. We can select a special type of planting mix to create a beneficial environment for better plant growth. Some of our favorite 'problem plants' like mint or bamboo can be grown in containers so they don't become invasive. They grow contained. Even if you have lots of space in your garden, you can sink a container into a hard to dig areas or in a root bound space under a tree.

Containers also come in many forms. Be creative, an old wheelbarrow filled with a variety of flowers can be an interesting part of the garden. A container can smile a welcome at your front door, or hold herbs readily available on your patio. They can be hung on walls, in trees, or from the house. They can be placed in the landscape among existing plants to add interest. Containers can even be placed in other containers. Lightweight pots can be used on second story patios and roofs although care needs to be taken not to incur structural damage.



There are, of course, some disadvantages to keep in mind before using containers. Care needs to be taken to be sure container plants get enough water, but not too much. During hot or dry times containers will need to be watered more often than plants rooted in garden soil. And, because more water is applied there is a need to fertilize more often. All that watering will leach out the nutrients from the planting mix.

Over time, plant roots will eventually out grow the container. There are two ways to deal with crowded roots. One way is to change containers. Move the plant to a larger container. Root pruning is the second method. Root pruning involves taking the plant out of the container, if possible, and trimming an inch of roots off the root ball and replacing the plant back into the original container. Larger containers require digging out a section of roots and filling with planting mix, to create more space for new roots.

Container gardening can be rewarding, adding a new dimension to your garden. For further information go to <http://ucanr.org/index.cfm> and enter "container gardening" in the search box. General gardening information can be obtained by going to <http://acmg.ucdavis.edu/> or calling the hot lines: 925-960-9420 or 510-639-1371.