

Container Gardening

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Q: I want to plant some flowers around my home but I don't have very good soil. What can I do to make sure I have beautiful plants all summer?

A: It is the time of year that we want to get vegetables and beautiful blooms planted around our homes. But not all of us have the best soil or the space for a garden plot. Container planting is perfect for these situations because we can plant one container with many different and colorful plants or we can plant several containers with vegetable plants for fresh food all summer long. Regardless if you're just planting a few blooms or an entire container vegetable garden, the first order of business before planting is filling those containers with the proper growing medium.

Plants like good drainage, especially those in containers. If water pools around plant roots too long, root rot will damage and possibly even kill the plant. For years, gardeners have been told to cover the bottom of containers with gravel, pieces of broken pottery, Styrofoam packing material and the like to help with drainage. **Do not do this!** This actually impedes drainage as air is trapped in the larger pores of the material at the bottom of the pot and the soil above needs to become completely saturated before it will drain. Instead of water draining immediately through the soil, then into gravel or other material and on out the drainage holes, water will completely saturate the soil so that no air spaces are left. This could take a long time and in the interim, plant roots will be starved for oxygen. For the best drainage only potting mix should be put into a plant container. Do not use native soil or garden soil, most are too heavy.

The shape of the container is also important to successful container gardening. We want the container to drain well but we also need it to hold enough water for the plant. We have very hot days in the summer and we need the container soil to stay moist enough for the plant to make it through the day without drying out. A shallow plant container filled with soil will hold more water than a tall, narrow container. This has to do with gravitational pull on the water in the soil. A taller column of water will drain much faster than a shorter one. So it is best to choose containers that are shorter and wider.

Finally, you are ready to plant. If you are planting vegetables you most likely will plant one plant per container unless you are planting greens or herbs. But if you are planting a container with flowers you want to plant is so that it will appear full and overflowing with blooms. Try using the thriller, filler and spiller planting technique. Thrillers are plants with a bit of height that are eye catching, they can either be flowering or foliage plants or ornamental grasses. These are planted either in the middle or to the back of the container. Filler plants tend to be more rounded or mounded in growth habit and make the container look full. And the Spillers are trailing plants that hang over the edge of the planter. Spillers should be placed close to the edge of the container. To see more about this planting technique check out the Proven Winners website <https://www.provenwinners.com/Container-Design>.