



## **Containers**

### **Beryl Harris**

If you have never tried container gardening, I would suggest that you do. You can place pots of annuals in those blank spots in the garden, or perhaps a big bouquet by the door that you and visitors use the most. On a porch or deck, it softens, adds interest, and colour. You can even use containers to block an unwanted view, perhaps hide you and your bikini from the neighbours!

But remember most of gardening rules still apply. You must choose the right location for the plants you are going to grow. Whether they are for sun or shade, match the plants to the available light, make sure that you are not placing them in a very windy position. You do not want the plants blown over, or worse yet have any tall ones broken. Windy positions require more water, and if they do get blown over, you may have that cherished pot cracked or broken.

Once you have decided where you are going to place your container, you have to decide what kind of pot or container will work the best for that position. The larger the container, the easier it will be to keep it from going dry. I would suggest that you check out the thrift stores, and yard sales are also a good place to look. You can use almost anything, old boots are fun, old tea and coffee pots, an old sink makes a wonderful container for a scree garden. I had a new toilet installed and the old one, from 1939 made a funny container last summer. It makes people do a double take especially with plants spilling over the edges.

Whatever you decide to choose you must provide good drainage, preferably holes, but a layer of gravel works well too. You can use anything that will give you good drainage for you do not want water lying in the bottom of your container causing root rot and the death of your plants.

Now what soil do we put into that container? Do not take your shovel and dig a hole in your garden, tossing the soil into the container. The water holding ability and conditions of potting soil are drastically different than your garden soil – plus you will have to fill in the hole you have just created! You need a special mix. You can purchase exactly the correct thing or make your own.

Another good idea is to use those water-retaining crystals. We had them added to the hanging baskets in the village of Lakefield and they worked very well, especially with the heat last year.

Just about any plant will do well, but here are some tips for containers:

- Make planting easy and plant your containers in place so you do not have to carry heavy pots around.
- Use fresh soil mix in new or clean containers. If you are using clay pots, then soak them for 24 hours before you start planting. If you are using old containers, then treat the insides with a solution of 1 part bleach to nine parts of water, rinse well with clean water afterwards.
- To save soil mixture and make the container even lighter, fill the bottom third with styro-foam packing peanuts, crushed pop cans. You can cover with a weed barrier fabric, to prevent the soil from settling between the filler.
- Arrange the plants whilst they are still in their pots, or containers, it is easier to see how things are going to look this way. Then plant, placing the soil so that the top of their root ball is about an inch below the lip of the container and water well.
- Use a combination of vertical, filler, and trailing plants. For verticals, depending on the type of container, I like Black Eyed Susan Vine on a small trellis, Dwarf papyrus, ornamental grasses, Purple Majesty Millet. For trailing plants I love Licorice Vine, it anchors and softens the look of any container, lasts through a light frost. You can also use Dichondra, Lamium, Petunias, or Sweet potato vine. For fillers, I like Coleus, Geranium, Impatiens, Penta, and Verbena.
- Make sure that the plants have the same light, soil, and water requirements making the correct choice for light, wind and temperatures for the location.
- If you are a “cottager” and return to the city every Sunday, use drought resistant plants such as moss roses, zinnias and my beloved Gazanias. When you return, the Gazanias may look dreadful, but a good watering and they perk right back, I never water mine and they live on the hot cement down by the water, and are splashed by the boats going by.
- Do not forget the food. I would prefer if you added a slow release fertilizer into the soil mix, if you think that you will not remember to feed the plants. I prefer a 20-20-20 mix.
- You will have to pull out the odd weed that will appear, make sure that you do not plant a slow growing something, with a fast growing something, for you will find one will take over and the slower one will be either invisible or just give up.

Life is not over once you have done all this. You will still have to dead head, trim, weed, fertilize, water and enjoy for the rest of the season.

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