

CONTAINER GARDENING

By Chris Gutke

There are several steps that you can take when you are putting together any old container garden, however, if you would like your containers to be more than just the regular old container there are essential steps that **must** be taken in order to obtain that pot that leaves your friends and neighbors in awe!

THUS:

THE CONTAINER GARDENING RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

This recipe calls for:

* Containers * Plants * Vegetable brush * Screening * A designated location
* Growing media * Fertilizers * Drill * Draining Material * Plant knowledge

Step #1: Choose your container!

With all sorts of containers out there, it is essential that you pick one that will fit your plants, has been properly cleaned if it is not new, and has drainage holes in the bottom.

Here is a list of different container types to try:

- Pulp- inexpensive, sturdy for one year, large drain holes, comes in a variety of sizes, only a few colors to choose from.
- Clay- inexpensive, comes with or without glaze, can be easily dressed up, steals water from plants, heavy, gives a charming feel, break easily.
- Plastic- fairly inexpensive, light material, variety of colors, can fade, crack easily, variety of sizes, can come pre decorated, holds moisture well.
- Cement- expensive, very heavy, not a lot of color choices, variety of sizes, adds a sterile look, can be dressed up.
- Wood- some of it comes treated, porous, not a lot of color choice, can be dressed up, a little more expensive than plastic, warps.

To properly clean your old pots:

- Use a wire vegetable brush to scrub out old pots.
- Use a bleach concentration to kill germs and mold on surfaces.
- Have them stored right to begin with.
- Remember that dirty pots often harbor diseases.

Step #2: Prepping your container.

There are some quick and easy tips to make sure that your plants will be able to get the most out of their new environment, they include:

- Making sure that those drain holes are there and that they work. Use a drill if there are no perforated holes already to punch out.
- Placing metal screening in the bottom of the pot as a sure-fire way to detour snails and other pests.
- Adding some draining material to the bottom of the pot. These materials can include, non-dissolvable packing peanuts, bark, crushed cans, pinecones, broken clay pots, and perlite.

Step #3: Filling your container.

The growing medium that you use will show through to the plants that you use. Because the roots of the plants will be confined to such a small space it is best to help the roots get the most from their stay by using enriched soil. Before you put the dirt into the pot this is a good time to add a moisture holding agent such as soil moist, due to the fast loss of water that pots experience.

Use a good potting mix with a combination of organic materials and mineral materials.

Organic materials can include:

Bark/Soil pep
Peat moss
Cocoa Fiber
Compost

Mineral materials can include:

Sand
Perlite
Vermiculite

REMEMBER NOT TO USE REGULAR OLD GARDEN DIRT!

Step #4: Fertilizers.

There are many commercial potting soil mixes that you can buy that contain fertilizers already. If you prefer to make your own you should add it to the soil before you add your plants. Fertilization is also going to vary depending on what plants will be in your container, for instance, some prefer more acidic or more alkaline soil so be sure to note that when adding your fertilizers.

Step #5: Plant Selection.

This is really one of the most important steps but also the most fun and rewarding steps. There is a world of plants to choose from and the combinations are endless. One of the best things to use when planting a container is your own imagination. Some steps to help you in your plant selection include:

- Have a vision. Know what you want to accomplish with your container.
- Know where you are going to be putting your container so that you can pick your plants according to their sunlight needs.
- Remember that the foliage is part of the fun. There are a lot of different textures, shapes, and colors so don't buy your plant on flower alone.
- Try to size up your plants. When you are purchasing the plants for your containers try to buy all of the same size plants so that the small ones won't get lost under the big ones.
- To avoid watering problems, try to select plants that have the same water requirements.
- Less is okay, a little more is better, lots is best. Fill your pots! By bulking plants you help to avoid that low-value container look.
- Think BIG. Don't forget that there are perennials and even shrubs and trees that can be contained.
- Don't be afraid to be too simple. Going solo with just one plant such as a pot with all yellow daisies actually says a lot. Experts say that simplicity and elegance are in again this year.

Step #6: Watering ☺/☹

Believe it or not, now that your containers are planted, they don't need watered daily. Watering is actually one of the places that even the best gardener goes wrong. It is a tricky thing to get the hang of but here are some pointers:

- If you haven't added a water holding agent to the soil, your pot might need a little more water than the average one.
- After you have all of your plants situated, water your pot in thoroughly. The water should drain out the bottom of the pot, in fact every time that you water, the water should drain out the bottom.
- Because salt tends to build up in the pots, you need to water deeper and less often rather than frequently and shallow. (this will prevent staining your cement).
- Use the second knuckle rule, that is if you can put your finger in up to the second knuckle and still feel moisture then your pot doesn't need watered!
- Soak your clay pots in water for 24 hours before planting in them so that you won't have a problem with them stealing the water away from your plants.

Step #7: What do I do now?

Now that you have your pots all put together and they are happily in the location that you were planning on keeping in them you may wonder what should you do next. Actually what a lot of people will do now (and I hope that you are not one of them) is love them to death. Believe it or not, the plants will grow on their own, they don't need to be looked at and fussed over and especially not watered every day. Cut the apron strings and try to stay indoors a day or two if it is killing you and it is guaranteed that you will have the best pots that you have ever seen!

