**Container Gardening**

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**Jean’s - The Right Plant Place**

Container gardens are an excellent way to add color and pizazz to any size space. For best results, start with quality materials (good grade potting mix and healthy plants)!

Things to consider:

1. Containers: Nearly anything can be made into a planter! Make sure whatever you use has holes for drainage and that it complements the plants you plan to use Plants that like dry conditions will do well in terra cotta pots, while moisture-loving plants will do better in plastic or ceramic pots. We have seen all kinds of old ‘junk’ made into planters, including wheelbarrows, bathtubs, grills, and even a canoe! Line with landscape fabric to prevent soil from escaping.
2. Light: Many gardeners overestimate how much sun particular areas receive. You may need to place your pots, then time how long it takes for the sun to hit them. There are even sunlight calculators available! The amount of light available will dictate what plants you put into your containers as well as how much you’ll need to water. Of course, your previous experience with plants will help guide your decisions.
3. Soil: Most ‘soil’ mixes have little to no actual dirt. Components of soil-less mixes include peat moss, bark, vermiculite, perlite, and/or sand in some combination. Garden soil is problematic for containers as it is much heavier than soil-less mixes and can harbor insects or fungi. Some of the mixes have fertilizer in them, but you can easily add time-release fertilizer if you wish. Succulent soil is different from other mixes as it will have more bark and sand and thus better drainage. We DO recommend changing container soil yearly; plants will remove most nutrients, and even adding fertilizer won’t bring them back entirely.
4. Fertilizer: Early in the season, use a 10-10-10 fertilizer. The first number relates to nitrogen content, the second is phosphorous, and the third is potassium. Nitrogen stimulates leaf production. To encourage flowering, switch to a fertilizer with a high middle number in June. Petunias will appreciate an acid fertilizer such as Miracid. Fertilizing every two weeks should be sufficient for most containers (and you can use the fertilizer at about half-strength of what the box says!). Another thing that helps plants get established is mycorrhizal fungi (which is found in some growing media or can be purchased separately). These fungi help the plants by increasing the surface area of the roots so they can take up water and nutrients more efficiently.
5. Watering: Containers require regular watering, particularly as the plants fill out. It is best to water at the base of the plant rather than water plants overhead. When in doubt, poke your finger in it; if it’s dry at that level, you’ll need to water. It is possible to over-water certain plants, particularly succulents, so if you are a chronic over-waterer, watch for that. Watering in the morning is best as that is when plants most efficiently take up water.
6. Color combinations: Complementary colors are opposite of each other on the color wheel, *i.e.* red/green, blue/orange, and purple/yellow. Analogous colors are next to each other.
   1. Cool colors make areas look larger than they are and don’t draw attention.
   2. Warm colors highlight certain areas, make areas look smaller, and draw attention.
   3. Monochromatic colors are variants of the same color.
   4. Black can tone down other colors.
   5. White glows after dusk and in shady environments and can make other colors pop.
7. Plant combinations
   1. Types of plants
      1. Thriller: dramatic, center of the pot
      2. Filler: contrasts but still compliments the thriller
      3. Spiller: trails over, ‘anchors’ the container
      4. Single plants can be used if they will fill out the container adequately.
      5. Perennials are sometimes used, but most likely won’t survive the winter in the pot. They can be removed and planted in the fall (we recommend using rooting fertilizer).
   2. Plant for seasons and/or occasions.
   3. Non-flowering plants can be used in conjunction with or in lieu of flowering plants.
   4. Use plants with similar light and water requirements.
   5. If you are happy with your containers, keep the tags or take notes!
8. Miniature Gardening: use shallow containers when possible, as many plants used in these gardens have shallow roots. Line containers with something for moisture retention and/or to protect your container (*i.e.* plastic, moss, burlap, etc.).

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