

Hanging Baskets

Overview

Hanging baskets, overflowing with abundant richly-colored flowers, are valued summer-time features in many cities and gardens.

Choose a container

A suitable container is large enough to last through the entire growing season as well as light-weight enough to hoist into place. A plain container works well because, within a short time, the pot will be completely covered by your trailing plants.

Containers come in a variety of shapes, sizes and materials. Wood, sphagnum moss, and unglazed clay or terra cotta, can dry out quickly. These can be lined (usually with a perforated plastic) to keep them moist longer. Realize that clay and terra cotta will be very heavy after they are planted and watered. Select containers that fit your style, décor, and landscape.

Realize that a 10-inch container may need to be watered every 1 to 2 days. Smaller containers will require even more frequent watering.

Use a potting mix

Use a good quality potting mix to fill your container. These products are formulated to be very coarse, thereby ensuring good drainage in containers. A well-drained mix goes a long way toward promoting healthy plants.

If you re-use the container in another season, consider replacing the potting mix. Replacement would be critical to success if the previous planting had a root disease; if so, also wash the container well.

Don't use garden soil in containers because its fine texture severely limits drainage and, thus, inhibits root growth. Garden soil may also bring in disease, insects, and weed seeds.

Be aware that the oft-suggested "coarse stuff in the bottom of the container for drainage" is wrong. Because of the dynamics of water movement within a container, that coarse material will inhibit drainage.

Use fertilizer

Get your plants off to a running start by mixing fertilizer into the potting mix before planting. A slow-release formula designed to persist for 3 to 4 months works well because it will last for the entire season. After all the plants are in place, settle the potting mix

around their root balls with water enriched with half-strength soluble fertilizer.

Choose your plants

It is essential that the plants in an individual container do well under the same growing conditions, be that sun or shade, moist or relatively dry. Also keep in mind the growth habit of the plants, such as upright or trailing. You can combine annuals and perennials in an individual pot for just a single season then, at the end of the season, you can replace the annuals for a fresh, new look.

Design and plant

After you select a planter, and have the plants and potting mix at hand, follow these steps for success:

1. Pour out the amount of potting mix you think you'll need, then mix in a 3- to 4-month slow-release formula fertilizer; follow label instructions for the amount to use.
2. Pour just enough potting mix into your container so that the plants can be set in place and still be 1 inch below the rim of your container. (Be aware that if you completely fill the container, you'll have to repeatedly dig out potting mix to make room for the next root ball.)
3. Set the tall upright plants in the center or back of the container, fill in with clumpers next, then finish with trailing plants toward the container's edge. To create a balanced look, place two or more of the same plant (or several plants of similar size, foliage, and color) opposite each other in the container.
4. To complete the planting, fill in around the plants with extra potting mix to meld the combination and to cover any exposed roots. When everything is in place, the potting mix should be about 1 inch below the rim of the planter to allow space for watering.
5. Settle the potting mix around the root balls with fertilizer-enriched water mixed at half-strength.
6. Hang your container where the sun or shade conditions match your plants' requirements. Now you can sit back, relax and enjoy!

Maintain your container

Water when needed. You won't need to water as often during cool or mild weather as you will when it's warm, even hot, and/or breezy. During hot weather, you may need to water once or twice a day depending upon the size of the container and the number and kind of plants in it.

When in doubt about the need for water, feel the surface of the potting mix. Water if it is dry, don't if it is moist.

The initial dose of fertilizer you mixed into the potting mix may be adequate to carry the plants through the season. But if the plants start to lag,

supplement with a water-soluble fertilizer once or twice a week, then repeat as needed.

And to keep everything looking tidy through the season, deadhead (remove faded flowers) at least once a week.

A few suggested plants

Numerous plants are successful in seasonal hanging baskets. Those listed below are just a few of the very many possible suggestions. Notice that some plants are suited to both sun and shade.

Upright plants for sun

<i>Angelonia</i>	<i>Heliotrope</i>
<i>Cordylina</i>	<i>Lantana</i>
<i>Cosmos</i>	<i>Nicotiana</i>
Daisies	<i>Osteospermum</i>
<i>Dracaena</i>	<i>Salvia</i>
<i>Geranium</i>	Snapdragon
Ornamental grasses	

Upright plants for shade

<i>Dracaena</i>	Shade coleus
Double impatiens	Rex begonia
Ferns	<i>Fuchsia</i>
New Guinea impatiens	Tuberous begonia

Clumping plants for sun

<i>Bidens</i>	<i>Geranium</i>
<i>Brachycome</i>	Marigold
<i>Diascia</i>	<i>Nemesia</i>
Fantasy petunia	Sun coleus
Fibrous begonia	Upright lobelia

Clumping plants for shade

<i>Brachycome</i>	<i>Nemesia</i>
<i>Coleus</i>	Polka dot plant
<i>Impatiens</i>	

Trailing plants for sun

<i>Anagalis</i>	Lotus vine
<i>Alyssum</i>	Million bells
<i>Bacopa</i>	<i>Portulaca</i>
Creeping Charlie	<i>Scaevola</i>
Creeping Jenny	Sweet potato vine
Creeping Zinnia	Trailing lobelia
Ivy	Trailing petunia
<i>Lamium</i>	<i>Verbena</i>
Licorice plant	<i>Vinca</i>

Trailing plants for shade

<i>Bacopa</i>	<i>Lamium</i>
Creeping Charlie	Licorice plant
Creeping Jenny	Lotus vine
<i>Fuchsia</i>	Sweet potato vine
Ivy	

Additional information

Oregon State University doesn't currently have any publications about growing and/or using hanging baskets.

However, OSU Master Gardeners at your county's Extension Service office are available to answer your questions. See phone numbers below.

So many books are available about growing hanging baskets that it's difficult to limit our suggestions to just a few titles. You'll find many more at libraries and bookstores.

Hanging Baskets: A Practical Step-By-Step Guide by Jenny Hendy

Year-Round Containers, Baskets & Boxes by Graham Strong and Claire Phoenix

The Hanging Garden by Sue Fisher

Container and Hanging Gardens (Ortho Books)

Gardening in Containers (Sunset)

Pots in the Garden by Ray Rogers

Master Gardener™ Advice

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas County), 503-821-1150 (Washington County), or 503-445-4608 (Multnomah County).
- For more 10-Minute University™ handouts and class schedule, visit www.cmastergardeners.org or www.metromastergardeners.org.
- Look for Master Gardeners at area Farmers' Markets.