

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

	University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment Cooperative Extension Service
	extension.ca.uky.edu HORTICULTURE EDUCATION Annette Meyer Heisdorffer, PhD Daviness County Extension Office

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A Variety of Plants Available for Container Gardening Annette Meyer Heisdorffer, Ph.D.

Enjoying flowering plants daily is possible by growing them in containers and placing them near the front door, deck, patio, and even apartment or condo balconies. Growing vegetables in containers makes gardening easier and more accessible. Combine a variety of plants with similar requirements for added interest.

The Boston fern is a common container plant requiring shade. Ferns will scorch and turn brown under hot conditions. However, in full sun to partial shade situations, grow ‘Macho’ and ‘Kimberly Queen’ ferns that tolerate the sun in pots or hanging baskets. The ‘Macho’ fern becomes large and very impressive. ‘Kimberly Queen’ is finer in texture but makes a nice show too. If you want to overwinter them, they should be taken inside before the first frost in the fall and kept in the house during the winter.

Numerous annual flowering plants are suitable for containers receiving full sun. These include calibrachoa (Million Bells® or Superbells®), bidens, geranium, lantana, marigold, *Mercardonia* ‘Gold Dust’, Mountain Frost®, periwinkle (vinca), petunias, SunPatients®, Supertunias®, sun coleus, spreading summer snapdragons, tall summer snapdragons, and

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ornamental sweet potato vines with chartreuse or nearly black leaves. Remember, annuals are plants that live for only one year, but they make a big impact in the landscape.

Other annuals such as diascia, licorice plant, nemesia, sun coleus, verbena, and vinca vine will grow in full sun to part shade. Wax or fibrous-rooted begonias, caladiums, Rex begonia, Dragon Wing® begonia, New Guinea impatiens, and coleus, that are not sun tolerant, grow in partially shaded to shaded locations. Impatiens prefer full shade but will tolerate a couple of hours of morning sun.

Different types of annual plants can be used in hanging baskets or window boxes. Plants that trail over the sides are very dramatic. Calibrachoa (Million Bells® or Superbells®), bacopa, cascading petunias, ivy geraniums, moss rose, Supertunia® petunias, trailing sun coleus, trailing periwinkle, verbena, and wave petunias, are annuals that prefer full sun and tolerate a couple of hours of partial shade during the day.

Green, non-blooming spike plants and Graceful Grasses® Prince Tut™ and King Tut®, commonly known as Egyptian papyrus, are used to provide height in containers. Another tall Graceful Grasses® purple fountain grass adding season-long interest.

Perennials can be planted within the same container as annuals too. Perennials live from year to year as long as the roots of the plant are protected from freezing during the winter. This can be accomplished by placing the pot in a protected area or by burying the pot in the ground over winter.

Coral bells (*Heuchera*) are attractive perennials when combined with other plants because of the variety of leaf colors and patterns available. What an eye-catcher in a container!

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The daylily ‘Stella d’ Oro’ is a nice perennial to grow in containers in full sun. Smaller hostas grow well in pots in the shade.

Container gardening is not limited to ornamental plants. Vegetables suited for containers include beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cucumber, bush cucumber, eggplant, kale, leaf lettuce, pepper, radishes, spinach, summer squash, Swiss chard, tomatoes, cherry or grape tomatoes, turnips, and zucchini. Herbs suited for containers include chives, garden thyme, basil, marjoram, and summer savory. These plants require full sun for the best production.

Containers are available in many sizes, forms, and shapes. They can be made of clay, redwood, cedarwood, or plastic. Never use containers that have held products that are toxic to plants or people. Wood for use around vegetable plants should never be treated with creosote or pentachlorophenol (Penta) wood preservatives. These may be toxic to plants and harmful to people as well.

Make sure the container has drainage holes in the bottom, so plant roots do not stand in water, which causes them to die. Remember to empty saucers placed under a container to collect water to avoid keeping the plants too wet or allowing mosquitoes to develop.

Use a commercially prepared potting soil mix in containers. Using only garden soil is not recommended because it does not allow proper water drainage. The commercially prepared mix allows water to drain easily. If it is too fine, the mix will hold too much moisture and cause the roots to rot.

Pay particular attention to watering container gardens. The potting soil can dry out quickly, especially on a concrete patio in full sun. Water when the soil feels dry, possibly

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several times each week as the plants grow. However, the soil should not be soggy. When watering, add water until it runs out of the drainage holes. This helps to prevent a buildup of salts in the soil from fertilizer.

Ornamental plants are fertilized once every two to three weeks with a soluble plant fertilizer according to the label directions. When starting vegetables from seed in a pot, make the first fertilizer application three weeks after the plants have two sets of leaves. Then repeat once a week using a soluble plant fertilizer at one-half strength according to the label directions.

For more information about gardening in containers, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

Croton is a house plant that adds colorful leaves to a planter in full sun to partial shade. Many of the plants in the article are available at locally owned garden centers and nurseries.

Upcoming Event:

“Building a Better Monarch Butterfly Garden” is scheduled for April 9 at 1:00 p.m. at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service and co-sponsored with the Green River Area Extension Master Gardener Association.

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