

CONTAINER ORNAMENTALS SOLVE PREPARATION AND MAINTENANCE WOES

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As a result of efforts to minimize maintenance, many areas around club houses and public buildings lack the sparkle and zip of colorful annual flower plantings. The groundskeeper may justifiably point to compacted and nutritionally deficient soil conditions, poor drainage, and simply a lack of open ground as reasons for not experimenting more with annuals. In addition to that, one can usually add lack of experience in working with flowers. Once one has seen the dramatic difference that colorful flowers can make in the grounds and has experienced the satisfaction of working with the plants, he will be eager to continue and increase his horticultural expertise in this area.

A method of growing annuals that can completely circumvent dealing with the afore-mentioned problems is to grow the plants in containers. This allows one to start with a soil mix of his choice and avoid the long-term or costly process of modifying existing soil for vigorous flower production. It also introduces an element of flexibility that allows plants to be moved to more favorable light conditions for better growth, to protected areas in times of severe weather, and to focal areas for accent at special occasions. Plants in containers enjoy good air circulation which cuts down on disease infestation. Crawling pests may never reach them at all.

Container selection should be guided by a few growing rules as well as aesthetic considerations. A large container, over 3 feet in diameter, is easier to keep moist than a smaller one which dries out frequently. Outdoor container plants dry out faster than plants in the ground. Unless there is abundant rain, they need water almost every other day in warm weather. In hot sunny locations with drying winds, daily watering may be required.

Containers should also have drainage holes so that the soil will not become water-logged during times of heavy rain. If the soil mix is light enough and the container has drainage holes, overwatering will never be a problem. On the contrary, during times of heavy rainfall, it is easy to neglect plants under eaves and awnings that are not benefiting from that moisture.

Containers should be compatible with their surroundings. Concrete, stone, and terra cotta have an earthy appearance and suit many environs. Wooden boxes and tubs have widespread appeal. Fancy urns of metal or stone are exquisite and add to the Victorian feeling or other historic period decor.

Selection of flowering plants for container growing involves an evaluation of the plant's specific growing requirements. These conditions are basically the same as for growing the plant in the ground. If a plant that requires considerable sunlight to bloom, like geranium, is planted in a redwood tub and rolled to the north side of a clubhouse under an awning where the light intensity is greatly reduced, it simply will not flower profusely. By the same token, a fuchsia lover who is determined to hang this plant from a porch on the southwest corner of a building, will probably be disappointed when the hot sun and wind cause it to wither

and barely survive. The point is that we must select the right plant for the right place according to specific cultural requirements of the plant.

In the accompanying list are a number of plants that have reputations as good performers. Also there is a list of certain combinations of plants that combine well with each other because of their color, growth habit, texture, or degree of formality. Combination plantings are attractive and have the advantage of versatility. Plants that can perform best in the specific environment take over, while those that can't recede into the background. Since environmental conditions can vary considerably from location to location and are sometimes difficult to access accurately, this element of adaptability can result in great satisfaction to the groundskeeper.

Reliable Container Plants

For Sun

Ageratum
Geranium
Lobelia
Marigolds
Nasturtium
Petunia
Sedum
Sweet-alyssum

For Shade

Asparagus fern
Begonias, tuberous and wax
Browallia
Caladium
Coleus
Impatiens
Ivy
Lobelia
Variegated vinca
Viola

Suggested Specimen and Combination Plantings

Single specimen

Geraniums
Petunia
Tree form lantana, fuchsia, geranium, roses

Single specimen baskets

Donkey tail sedum
Fuchsia
Hanging Tuberous begonia
Ivy geranium

Mixed urns

Caladium, pink wax begonia, variegated English ivy
Coleus, mixed impatiens, browallia
Fancy leaved geraniums, ageratum, variegated vinca vine

Mixed hanging baskets

Blue violas, white sweet alyssum
Nasturtium, French marigolds, blue lobelia, blue ageratum
Ivy geraniums, asparagus fern, blue browallia

In general, more upright plants are selected for ground planters while cascading plants are used for hanging baskets, window boxes, and balustrade planters. However, vines and other hanging plants soften the edge of any container and are good choices to use around the edge of upright plants in containers that sit on the ground. Ivy, vinca, and asparagus fern are especially useful for this purpose and will not distract from the flowering plants being featured. When an urn is

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displayed on a pedestal it almost always needs some cascading plant material to enhance the display.

Containers of flowers can be planted in mid-spring and allowed to grow and fill out in a protected greenhouse environment before the danger of frost is over. If such space is not available, use plants grown in 4 or 6 inch pots for planting larger containers. Plants in small cell packs will take several weeks to fill out and are more susceptible to overwatering when they are first transplanted.

A main point to remember in planting a container is to not fill it too full of soil mix. Leaving from 2 to 6 inches as a reservoir at the top will allow water to soak down thoroughly and deeply rather than running down the outside of the container. A light soil mix of 1 part soil, 1 part peat, and part perlite will allow for good drainage. Complete watering keeps the root ball from drawing away from the container. If the soil becomes very dry, the root ball shrinks and water runs down the sides of the pot rather than in where the roots are.

Fertilizing on a regular schedule will insure continued development of the plants. A slow release

fertilizer mixed in the soil at the time of planting will benefit the plant throughout the growing season. Water soluble fertilizers applied once every other week are easy to use and stimulate plant growth. Many container plants deteriorate about mid season because they are nutritionally starved.

Watch the plants and observe their needs. For example, in sunny windy times more water is needed than on cool cloudy days, plants in unglazed containers dry out faster than those in wooden boxes; large containers hold moisture longer than smaller ones and plants close together shade one another and help to prevent excessive moisture loss.

With container plants one doesn't have to wait a whole season to try new decorating schemes or improve the growing conditions. Baskets and tubs can be moved, if they aren't too large, to areas of greater or lesser light intensity or into an area protected from strong winds.

If you haven't tried container gardening, do so this year and enjoy the satisfaction it will bring to you and those who will appreciate your labors. **WTT**



Agricultural Technical Institute students plant stone hemispherical urns in Wooster, Ohio, often coined the "tree city".