

# CONTAIN CLIENTS' **Gardens**



Proven Winners' Supertunia Raspberry Blast Petunia hybrid softens the corner of a hardscape.

## CONTAINERS OPEN UP NEW OPTIONS FOR PLANTINGS.

BY M. ROLL AND C.R. WILSON

**C**ONTAINERS CAN be grown where traditional landscape plantings are not possible, including apartment balconies, small courtyards, decks, patios and areas with poor soil. They are an ideal solution for clients in rental situations, with limited mobility, or with limited time to care for a large landscape.

### Container considerations

Just about any container can be used, however, make sure you never use a container that held toxic materials, especially if edible

plants are going to be grown.

No matter the container, the most important thing to consider is drainage. Plants will not grow successfully in soil that is continually waterlogged. In waterlogged soils, space fills with water and leaves no room for air, which is necessary for proper root growth. If there are no existing drainage holes in the container, make multiple holes in the bottom. Keep in mind that containers made from porous materials (like clay and wood) lose moisture quickly, but allow air movement into the root zone. Metal, plastic and glazed containers hold water longer, but restrict air movement making drainage holes especially

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Ball's Gryphon Begonia creates a uniform mound, while the company's Silver Falls Dichondra cascades out from under Celebration Orange N.G. Impatiens and Celebrette Frost N.G. Impatiens.

important. Use a container insert if you plan to use an expensive decorative container without drainage holes. Make sure the insert does not rest in water.

Consider whether your pots will be moved during the growing season. When water is added to soil in an already heavy container, the weight might be too much to lift easily. Plan ahead when planting large containers and add container dollies with wheels.

The container should be large enough so the plants won't dry out between waterings. Consider using larger containers with more soil to hold moisture and reduce maintenance.

The size of the container should accommodate the roots of the plants when fully grown. With flowers, a general rule is the larger the height of the flower, the more root mass is produced, thus requiring a larger container.

### Soil choice

Potting soil should be free of disease organisms, insects, and weed seeds. It should be porous yet hold water and nutrients with a slightly acidic pH. Do not use native soil, even if you can pasteurize it. Most native soils have a high percentage of clay particles that easily compact, reducing the oxygen available to the roots.

Never reuse the same potting soil from the previous growing season because it may contain disease organisms.

Soilless mixes contain many of the same ingredients as potting soil, but are two to three times lighter because they don't contain heavy soil. You can add up to 10% of the volume with clean, coarse sand to add weight for top-heavy plants.

The rapid growth of many container plants quickly depletes the fertilizer available in the limited volume of soil. Well-drained soil mixes also result in the regular loss of fertilizer in the drainage water. To provide the right amount of fertilizer, mix controlled-release fertilizer granules into

the soil mix at planting. The large number of plants often grown in containers places extra demands on the fertilizer supplied by timed-release products. Fully soluble fertilizer products can be added to the irrigation water to supplement or replace timed-release products.

### Design basics

There are a few design principles to consider when planting container gardens.

To avoid a flat look, add a spike — a tall plant, or a garden ornament — for height and a trailing plant to drape down from the container. A grouping of different-sized containers will also help achieve this goal. Choose plants that are in scale with the size of the container and planting backdrop. Generally, plants should be twice as tall as the visible part of the container. If planting one large plant, such as an ornamental grass, select a larger container that will fulfill both plant growth and design needs.

Consider the texture or shapes of plant leaves and flowers. A variety of leaf shapes and sizes can be more appealing than uniform foliage. Combine round-shaped flowers with irregularly shaped ones.

Use complementary colors on the opposite side of the color wheel or analogous colors adjacent on the color wheel. Also consider whether you want an area to stand out through the use of hot colors like orange and red, or recede through the use of cool colors like blue and violet. Repeating a flower color among different vertical plant layers will give a stronger and more unified appearance.

### Plant types

The group of plants most immediately thought of for container use may be annuals. In addition to new versions of old favorites, many new choices are available. Geraniums feature new zonal, ivy, and cascading types. New petunia colors are available as well as improved trailing

types that require no pinching or pruning. Other improvements have been seen in Verbena, Salvia, Impatiens and Fuchsia.

Don't overlook "indoor" or tropical foliage plants for shady areas. Cacti and succulents can also be used, but don't combine them with plants that require more moisture.

Perennials are generally treated as annuals in containers and not overwintered. Bulbs and bulb-like plants can also be grown in containers. Ornamental grasses and grass-like plants grown in containers make bold statements.

Either alone or for height in a mixed container, consider woody plants. If you want to evoke an English garden, container roses are a good choice. Vines on a trellis can also be used in containers. Consider morning glory, Nasturtium, scarlet runner bean, or canary creeper.

Many vegetables and herbs can be successfully grown in containers as well. **LM**

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