

Container Gardening

Lecture 6

Container gardening is one of the most popular gardening trends today. Mixed plantings in large containers create focal points by combining decorative containers, dramatic plant forms and colorful flowers and foliage at entrances and on decks and patios. In addition, the container itself can be very decorative and provide architectural interest.



Anatomy of a Container Garden

Front door & Porch

An excellent place for containers — either singly or as a pair of matched pots. Careful selection and maintenance are essential as the display must always be in first-class condition

Path or Steps liner

A line of identical pots or troughs can enhance the appearance of a plain walkway or flight of steps

Focal point

A large container or a group of smaller containers can be used to provide a focal point. Attractive trees and shrubs have an important role to play here — pot and plants must be in scale with the surroundings

Patio

The favourite place these days for free-standing containers. The starkness of bare walls and paving slabs is relieved by the presence of plants. Bedding plants and bulbs are the usual planting material

Balcony

Trailing plants to grow over the container and climbers to clothe the railings are widely grown. Use a lightweight container and a peat-based compost. Exposure to strong winds can be a problem

Hanging basket

A popular feature these days — about a third of gardens have one. The best site is partly sunny during the day and is protected from strong winds. Remember daily watering may be necessary in summer

Window sill

Window boxes add colour and interest to dull walls and windows. The construction material and its colour should not detract from the plants — make sure that the box is firmly attached

Greenhouse

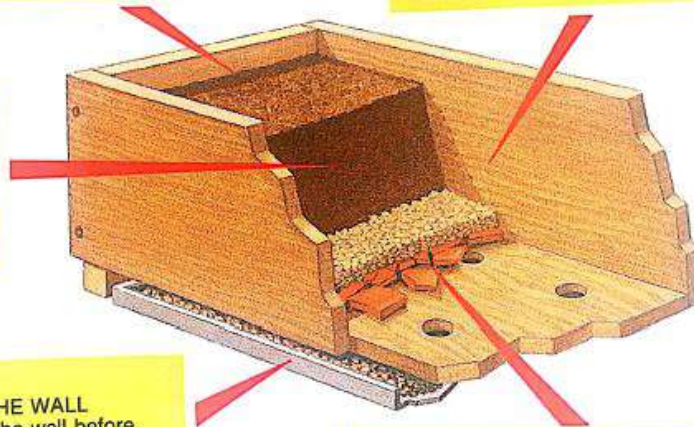
Planting vegetables in the border soil can create all sorts of problems — the greenhouse is usually filled with pots and growing bags which contain suitable growing media

Filling a Window Box

**STEP 5:
PLANT UP THE CONTAINER**
Plant firmly — the compost should be level with the soil mark on the stems. Some people prefer to use pot-grown plants and to leave them in their pots — in this case ordinary peat can be used to fill the box. A 1 in. watering space above the surface should be present after planting. Water in immediately

**STEP 1:
BUY OR MAKE THE WINDOW BOX**
If you decide to make one, use ¾ in. thick hardwood. The minimum depth and width should be 8 in. and the length should be about 2 in. less than the sill length. Use water-resistant glue and brass screws — drill ½-¾ in. wide drainage holes in the base at 4-6 in. intervals

**STEP 4:
ADD THE COMPOST LAYER**
Add moist peat-based potting compost or Multicompost. Press this layer down gently with your hands



**STEP 2:
ATTACH THE BOX TO THE WALL**
Attach the empty box to the wall before filling and planting — moving a filled box can be dangerous. Use strong steel brackets — make sure fixings are large enough to support the weight to be carried. An optional extra is a drip tray filled with gravel below the drainage holes

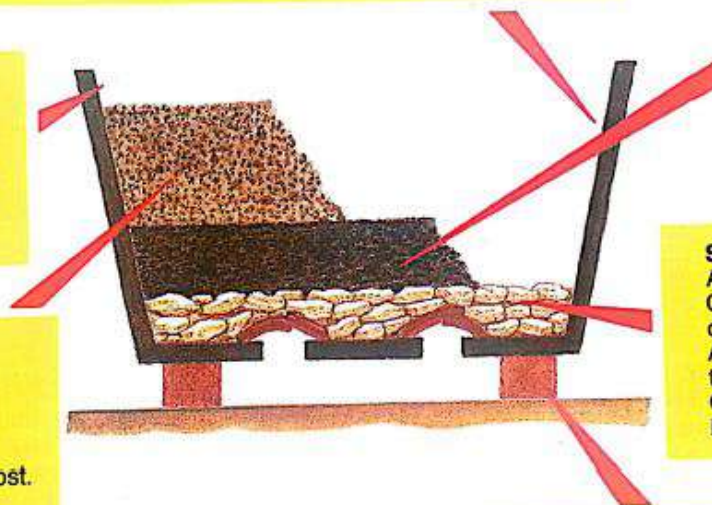
**STEP 3:
ADD THE DRAINAGE LAYER**
Cover the drainage holes with crocks or a fine mesh screen. Add a 1 in. layer of gravel to help drainage. Omit this step if weight is a problem

Filling a Tub or Trough

**STEP 1:
PREPARE THE CONTAINER**
Make sure the inside is thoroughly clean if the container has been used before. Soak if material is porous. New wood must be treated with a water-based preservative. Half-barrels may be charred with a blowlamp for protection against rotting

**STEP 6:
PLANT UP THE CONTAINER**
Plant firmly. A 1-3 in. watering space should be present after planting. Water in immediately

**STEP 4:
ADD THE PEAT LAYER**
Add peat to reduce the cost of compost if the container is large — the compost layer above need be no more than 9 in. deep



**STEP 5:
ADD THE COMPOST LAYER**
Add moist soil-based or peat-based potting compost or Multicompost. Press this layer down gently with your hands

**STEP 3:
ADD THE DRAINAGE LAYER**
Cover the drainage holes with crocks or a fine mesh screen. Add a layer of rubble or gravel to help drainage and stability. Omit this stone layer if weight is a problem

Always use a wheeled trolley if you have to move a filled and heavy container from one part of the garden to another

**STEP 2:
PUT THE CONTAINER IN PLACE**
Move the container to the chosen site. This should be firm and level — raise the container above the surface if possible

Container types

1) Plant pot (clay)

- Classic choice because it is great for plant root growth: provides good air or oxygen exchange.
- Heavy
- Dries out quickly
- Develops mold, salts etching



2) Plastic & Fiberglass

- Lightweight, maybe too lightweight
- Hold moisture longer, maybe too long
- No staining
- Colorful, can be decorative and attractive



3) Wood

- Minimum temperature fluctuation: good insulators
- Needs replacing eventually, can last many years
- Informal, natural appearance



4) Glazed ceramic

- Beautiful
- Non-porous and can be too airtight for root growth
- May clash with plants flowers and foliage



5) Metal

- Little insulation: can be very hot or very cold, less of a problem in large containers

•Can be very attractive



6) Stone

- Heavy in weight and cost**
- Harder to find**
- Moss grows on containers**
- Drainage may be a problem.**



Container Types



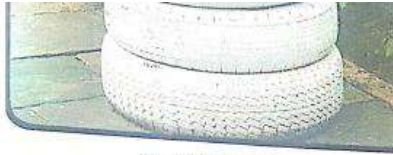
WINDOW BOX
Buy one or make your own — ensure that it is sturdy and that there is adequate drainage.

'SCRAPYARD' CONTAINER
Many scrap items can be used — demolition yards provide some. Chimney pots, old sinks and baths, old car tyres etc.

RAISED BED
Unlike ordinary containers the raised bed is truly part of the patio. A number of walling materials can be used (brick, reconstituted stone, wood etc) — choose one in keeping with the setting. Rockery perennials can be planted in the wall face during construction.

HANGING BASKET
Buy an open-sided basket for all-over planting or a closed-sided one to prevent dripping.

STONE CONTAINER
Natural stone containers are very heavy and expensive — reconstituted stone ones are much cheaper and are available in a wide assortment of sizes and finishes.



PLANT POT
 The basic container where practical considerations outweigh ornamental ones. Fibre pots have a natural look but last only for a couple of years. Plastic pots continue to take over from clay as they are cheap and not fragile.



GROWING BAG
 Nearly all greenhouse Tomatoes, Lettuce and Cucumber are grown nowadays in these containers. Cheap, but only use for ornamental display if you intend to cover the plastic surface with trailing plants.



PLASTIC CONTAINER
 A variety of heavy-duty plastics (polypropylene, polystyrene etc) is used to make pots and troughs in all sizes. Very popular, light-weight and inexpensive. Wide range of surfaces and colours is available. Draw-backs with ordinary plastic pots and troughs are that sunlight makes them brittle and heat insulation is poor.



WOODEN CONTAINER
 Extremely practical and suitable for most situations — thick wood is an excellent heat insulator. Shop-bought or do-it-yourself, make sure that the wood has been properly treated with a preservative. Many types are available — the most popular form is the half-barrel. Check that the boards are not split and the metal bands are secure.



METAL CONTAINER
 Many old planters were made of lead, iron or copper — no longer popular. Paint inside with Arbrex.

FIBREGLASS CONTAINER
 Pre-cast concrete and fibreglass are often used to create containers where large size and low cost are required.



NOVELTY CONTAINER
 The range of unusual containers is enormous — wheelbarrows, coal scuttles, litter baskets etc.

SINK GARDEN
 An old glazed kitchen sink makes an excellent container for rockery perennials. Raise up on bricks and use a gritty soil-based compost.





Container plants need fertilizer. You can use a slow release fertilizer in the soil mix and weekly liquid fertilizer applications for actively growing flowering annuals in containers.



Watering: very important

Irrigation is absolutely critical. The limited volume of potting soil in a container limits the amount of moisture that plants can obtain. Rainfall can help supply moisture if the container is not under a roof or tree. However, hot or dry weather can quickly deplete soil moisture. Water frequently to replenish soil moisture, usually at least three times a week. If hand-watering, use a hose-breaker or watering can that applies water in slow streams so as not to disturb potting soil or shallow roots. Watering in early morning keeps plants perky all day. Remember that plant water requirements will change with season, rainfall, stage of growth, and plant size.

Plants

Most tubs and troughs are used for spring-flowering bulbs and summer bedding plants to provide a colourful and often very effective display. But there are several other groups of plants which are suitable for containers and it is worthwhile being more adventurous.

BEDDING PLANTS

Your container garden should never be empty even if you rely solely on bedding plants. The summer bedding display should be followed in autumn with a planting of spring-flowering bedders (Polyanthus, Bellis, Myosotis etc) in some containers and winter-flowering types (Universal Pansy, Polyanthus 'Crescendo' etc) in others.

As a general rule it is wise to pick more compact varieties than are used in outdoor bedding and set them more closely together than you would do in a garden bed. The standard pattern is to have tall plants at the centre of free-standing containers or at the back of pots or troughs placed against a wall. Favourite summer types include Petunia, Geranium, Marigold, Lobelia, Nasturtium, Impatiens and Begonia.

BULBS

Tulips (species, double early and single early), Narcissus (triandrus, cyclamineus and jonquilla), Muscari, Hyacinth and Crocus of course, but you can try a few less usual types — Galanthus, Fritillaria, Tigridia, Erythronium and Ornithogalum are examples.

CONIFERS

A good choice for a year-round focal point. Container conifers include weeping types (*Cedrus deodara* 'Nana Aurea'), narrow columns (*Juniperus virginiana* 'Skyrocket'), spreading plants (*Juniperus media* 'Gold Coast') and round balls (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Green Globe').

TREES & SHRUBS

A tree or shrub can form the permanent centrepiece in a large container or it may be used as the sole occupant. Trimmed Box and Bay have been used for generations to frame doorways and line pathways, and more and more people these days are discovering that containers are for shrubs and not just for bedding plants. Types which have proved their worth include *Acer palmatum*, Azalea, Phormium, *Hydrangea*, Camellia, Cordyline, Bamboo, Yucca and Fatsia. Roses, Weeping Cherry, Holly and Clematis — all do well in pots and troughs.

HERBS

Pots of herbs grown close to the back door are welcome in winter, when a trip to the vegetable garden may be a cold and muddy trek. All the popular types will grow quite happily in pots — Chives, Sage, Parsley, Rosemary, Mint, Thyme and so on.

FRUIT & VEGETABLES

Here the range is more limited. Pot-grown fruit include Fig, Strawberry and dwarf varieties of Apple, Plum and Gooseberry — vegetables for containers include Tomato, Cucumber, Runner Bean and Aubergine.