

Container Gardening

Gray Barn Green Thumb Guide



Gardening in pots is a great way to decorate decks and soften porches. Container gardening also allows you to expand your garden and planting area. You can grow just about anything in containers. Trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, even herbs and vegetables! Here's how easy it is-

- 1. Choose a pot or container-** Pick a container, any container the a drainage hole. There has to be a drainage hole in the bottom or side of anything you choose to plant in. Without one, your plants will drown because water will collect at the bottom of the pot, unable to drain. Also, the larger the pot, the longer you can keep a larger plant in it.
- 2. Soil-** Fill your container about 70% up with a good potting soil. Always fill your container with potting soil. As long as you use a quality potting soil, it will be a complete product. This means it will have everything in it that your plants will need including compost and some meal fertilizers. We don't recommend putting things in the bottom of containers in order to fill up space in the pot so you use less potting soil. Plants like to grow in good soil, not rocks, pop bottles or packing peanuts.
- 3. Fertilizing-** Put a scoop of Osmocote or another slow release fertilizer on top of the soil. Mix it in with your hand. From here on out, fertilize every two weeks during the growing season if your container has annuals in it. Annuals are heavy feeders and need more than most other plants. If you do not have any annuals in a given pot, you'll only need to fertilize a couple times a year.
- 4. Plants and their layout-** Number one thing to know when you start to choose your plants is the amount of light the container will be getting. Once you have decided whether you're dealing with sun or shade, the classic container plan goes like this- a tall plant in the back or in the middle, depending on how you will position the pot, medium height plants in front of the tall and small or trailing plants at the very front. To create the most cost effective container, use evergreen plants as your tall and medium heights. By doing so, you only will need to change out your small or trailing plants through the year. Depending on the season, switch from primroses to pansies and pansies to petunias! And remember, you can grow almost anything in a container. Herbs and vegetables would use the same format as above. Put a tomato plant in the middle, lettuce or medium growing herbs at the base of the tomato and

then a cucumber or zucchini spilling over the sides. The possibilities are endless and it really is that easy!

5. **Watering-** Water needs will vary by the size of the pot and how much light it is getting. The most important thing to remember regarding watering containers is that they have no source for water aside from you and whatever falls from the sky, if it is out in the open. So during the warmer temperatures of late summer, containers will need to be watered sometimes daily. When you do water, water deep and thoroughly. Plant roots are going to extend deep towards the bottom of the pot. The water needs to get all the way down there. To check, poke your finger as deep into the soil as you can to make sure you have watered deep enough. Watering isn't hard or scary. It just has to be done with awareness and regularity.
6. **Maintenance-** Deadhead spent flowers and pull off browning foliage on your container plants regularly. Pinch back annuals and perennials as their blooms fade and many will rebloom. When you start to notice that containerized trees and shrubs are looking stressed- scraggly branches with small leaves for example- its time to do one of two things. One, pull the plant out and find a spot for it in the garden where the roots will have room to grow without restriction of a container. Or two, root prune it. To do this, pull the plant out onto of the container onto a tarp or piece of cardboard. Shake off as much of the soil as you can so the roots are easier to see. Using some good clippers, prune off about 1/3 of the roots. Choose smaller roots to cut than larger ones. This will restrict the plants growth and allow it to stay in the container a bit longer. This isn't a forever solution. Eventually the plant will need to be planted out in the garden. But root pruning will prolong that for a couple more seasons.