

## Container Gardening

### Mixed Container Garden

With a little practice, you can learn to create attractive focal pieces for your garden, patio or home by planting a variety of plants in a mixed container garden. There are a few rules to follow, but otherwise the possibilities are endless.

1. **Choose plants appropriate for the size of your container.**
2. **Match plants that have similar growing requirements: light, temperature, water, nutrition (fertilizer) and growth rate.**
3. **A few other things to think about:**

**Colors:** Flowers are not the only choices for color. Many foliage plants have very colorful leaves and stems.

**Bloom Time:** Depending on your objectives for your container, you can choose plants that bloom simultaneously or at different times so that you almost always have something blooming.

**Textures:** *How does the plant look overall?* Are the leaves and stems hard or soft, wispy, spiky, hairy, shiny?

**Growth Habit:** *How does the plant grow?* Are the leaves and stems spreading, upright, weeping, trailing, climbing, or clumping?



The most interesting containers are those that mix a variety of colors and textures, and growth habits. A no fail formula to follow for containers is to have the following three components:

**THRILLER:** The focal point plant. It is usually the tallest, the brightest color, and the one that really stands out. There should only be one focal point.

**FILLER:** These are smaller plants that fill in the bare space below and around the focal point plant. They can be colorful or flowering. They should compliment the focal point. You can choose one filler or use several, depending on the size of your container.

**SPILLER:** These are trailing plants that spill over the sides of the container. This adds more interest and variety to your container. Ivy is a very popular choice but there are many others.



*Dracaena marginata*  
(Thriller)

*Schefflera arboricola*  
(Filler)

*Tradescantia zebrina*  
(Spiller)

## Flower Globe

Create your own professional looking hanging basket by building a flower globe.

### Materials Needed:

- 2 Hanging Baskets with Coir Liners
- 1 Plant Saucer
- Potting Soil with Slow-Release Fertilizer
- Scissors
- Zip-ties
- Cardboard
- Annual Flowers (small)

### Construction:

1. Remove the chains used for hanging; you will reattach them later.
2. Place a plant saucer in the bottom basket to act as a reservoir, reducing the need for frequent watering. Then fill both baskets with potting soil (don't forget which one contains the saucer).
3. Place a piece of thick cardboard over the top basket and invert the basket so that it lies on top of the bottom basket. Fasten the zip-ties around the edges as you slowly pull the cardboard out.
4. Cut a hole in the top of the globe. You will likely need to add more soil and then water lightly so that the soil compacts naturally and fills the globe. Later you will use this hole for watering.
5. With your scissors, cut an "X" pattern where you want your plants to go. The flaps can be folded back around the base of the plant after inserting. Planting one at a time will help reduce loss of soil.
6. Once you have inserted all of your plants, reattach the hanging chain and water well. If you wish, place a plant in your watering hole for a more uniform look.

\*Note: It's best to have a helper for this project, but if you have to go it alone then you may find it easier to plant the baskets first and then invert them together forming the globe. Just remember that you will have some loss and compaction of soil and will need to add more through the top of the globe.



## Decorative Planter

Almost any concrete edging can be used to make a decorative planter for your patio or garden. Just purchase four pieces of edging, a square concrete stepping stone and some construction adhesive.



Construction:

1. Assemble the planter before gluing to ensure the pieces will fit; then apply your construction adhesive to each corner and adjust the pieces as needed to form a true square.
2. Once the glue has dried, place the concrete stepping stone in the desired location of your planter. Then align the walls of the planter so they are centered on the stepping stone.
3. Install your favorite annuals and perennials.



Tips:

- We used 16 inch concrete edging with a 16 inch stepping stone. This creates the illusion of a floating planter.
- We chose not to glue the planter frame to the base so that it could be broken down and moved as needed. It also allows water to drain through the cracks. If you choose to glue it, you may want to consider breaking the stepping stone base or purchasing a two stones of a smaller size, leaving a gap between them for drainage. You will also want to permanently install the planter since it will be extremely heavy and hard to move.
- For an added decorative touch, surround your planter with pebbles or small river rock.



## Alternative Container Gardening

Alternative or non-traditional container gardening includes the use of buckets, boxes, bags, and even floating water gardens to grow vegetables and flowering plants. Here are a few ideas to get you started...



A bucket or old hanging basket can be converted to an upside-down tomato container just by drilling a hole in the bottom. Try to drill your hole only big enough to fit your seedling without the whole plug falling through. Have someone hold the bucket right side up while you place a plant (tomatoes work well using this technique) through the hole. Add your potting soil so that it fills only about one-quarter of the bucket and hang in a sunny location (shown right). As your plant grows, you can gradually add more potting soil to the bucket.



Grow boxes offer more space for growing plants than traditional containers and most have sub-irrigation systems (white pipe, pictured right). This allows you to keep irrigation water off the foliage which helps reduce the occurrence of fungal diseases.



Strawberries (above) and tomatoes (left) are two edible crops commonly grown in grow boxes.



Some home gardeners have started planting their vegetables directly into their composted manure bags instead of planting in the ground or other container. Just be sure they are propped up well and have drainage holes. Another low cost option is grow bags, bags specifically made for growing plants. Some are made with a flat sturdy bottom, designed to replace hard plastic nursery pots. Others lay flat on the ground and work best with micro-irrigation. Both kinds are available from nursery supply companies.

Floating water gardens are another fun alternative for growing certain crops. The amount you spend on materials will vary on your particular setup, but all the materials can be used again and again so you will definitely get your money's worth.

The thing I love most about the floating water gardens is that it is all prep work and you don't have to worry about watering and fertilizing.

We created a mini floating water garden from a container we found (shown right) and built a larger floating water garden using an old children's swimming pool (below). Lettuce plugs were placed in cups and float on top of the water with the aid of a styrofoam sheet. As the plant grows, the new roots grow and live in the water below.



For more information, go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs184> or visit [http://vfd.ifas.ufl.edu/suwanneevalley/hydroponicgreenhouse/building\\_a\\_floating\\_hydroponic\\_garden.shtml](http://vfd.ifas.ufl.edu/suwanneevalley/hydroponicgreenhouse/building_a_floating_hydroponic_garden.shtml) to watch the virtual field day video on building a floating water garden.

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