



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Create Your Own Hanging Baskets and Window Boxes (July 20, 2024)

by Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardeners

Hanging baskets or window boxes full of flowers or foliage plants give a color boost to your house, patio, and garden. They can be used effectively, even in a very small space. Hanging baskets and window boxes extend the garden vertically. They can be grouped to provide dramatic interest and arranged to create a focal point wherever decoration is needed. If you choose plants carefully, hanging baskets and window boxes can last several years, or you can change the plantings to suit every season.

Gardening in Baskets and Boxes

A lightweight potting mix is needed for container gardening. Planting mixes provide excellent drainage and aeration yet still have water-holding capacity. Many are fortified with slow-release nutrients so that additional fertilizer applications can be less precise. Just about anything can serve as the container, but make sure that your basket or window box has drainage holes; a waterlogged planting mix leads to root rot and plant death.



Ready-made hanging wire and plastic baskets are available. Both have their advantages and disadvantages. Plastic baskets are inexpensive, easy to plant, and slower to dry out but crack with age, especially when in full sun. Wire baskets allow heavier plants, are often more attractive, and do not deteriorate. Window baskets are usually plastic or wood.

To keep the planting mix in a wire basket, use liners made of sphagnum or peat moss. Remember that both hanging baskets and especially window boxes, require a strong support system. Think ahead to the extra weight that a fresh watering will add.

Planting a Moss-Lined Wire Basket

First, soak the sphagnum or peat moss overnight in very warm water. Squeeze out as much water as possible and lay the moss snugly from the inside of the basket. The moss should be about 1 inch thick and as high as the basket. Add potting mixture to an inch below the full height. You can use new, young plants, or you can divide an old plant that has outgrown its spot in the garden, or you can use a little of each. Water plants well before arranging them in the pot, and water again after planting. You can plant it on the sides of the wire basket for added display. Simply poke holes in the moss from the outside and place a few plants through the wire basket, making sure the roots are positioned into the potting mixture. Frequent monitoring for moisture for the first week or two is essential.

Remember that containers dry out quickly, especially if exposed to sun and wind. Daily or even twice-daily watering may be needed, especially in late summer. If possible, add a drip mister system from a black plastic 1/2-inch hose with a valve that is governed by a timer. When the weather is extremely hot, water for three minutes three times a day. If you water manually, a water wand facilitates watering difficult-to-reach containers. If you travel, you will need to arrange for a "plant sitter!"

With frequent watering, nutrients are flushed out quickly. Therefore, it is important to fertilize on a regular, frequent schedule. Add timed-release pellets to your planting mix. If using a liquid fertilizer, feed baskets every two weeks from spring through summer with a complete fertilizer, diluted to half strength. Six hours of morning sun is enough sunlight for most plants to perform at their best. Afternoon shade in our San Joaquin Valley is recommended. Even though grasses and succulents benefit from sun protection when our afternoon temperatures are over 100 degrees, shade cloth above, of varying light-blocking degrees, can alter a hot patio into just the setting you need. Remove fading flowers as the season progresses to encourage new growth.



Wide Variety of Plant Choices

There is a vast array of plants to choose from. Decide if you want a single plant or combinations of plants: upright plants, hanging trailers, or a mix of both. Ivy, bacopa, and alyssum are an easy place to start. There are many succulents that hang attractively and form beautiful flower stalks. Of course, petunias, verbena, pelargoniums (geraniums), and ferns are tried-and-true favorites. Even herbs like rosemary, sage, mints, and oregano do very well in containers. How about miniature roses? Well, you may experiment and enjoy as you go!

You will find plenty of selection for baskets, lining material, hanging hardware, and an interesting variety of plants at any full-scale nursery. Any time of the year is acceptable to start, but Fall is a wonderful time to plant in our area. Start planning now for a beautiful winter display of red and white cyclamen. Soon, the autumn chrysanthemums will be arriving for a fun Thanksgiving planting. It's fun to watch your hanging plants grow, and your window boxes fill in!

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse

Sept. 12, 10 am - 2 pm, Luis Nursery Plant Clinic, Visalia

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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