

Water, Water, Water

Containers need to be watered frequently.

MOST OFTEN

Small or porous containers. In sunny or windy spots. With large or fast growing plants. If soil is exposed. Even more often as the roots grow and fill the container.

KNOWING WHEN TO WATER

- ♦ Planter feels lighter in weight
- ♦ Soil feels dry at depth of your finger
- ♦ Weather has been hot and dry
- ♦ Plants begin to wilt
- ♦ With experience through the season

DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEMS

A network of hoses, tubes and emitters set-up to deliver water to individual containers and hanging baskets will save you time and effort. While challenging to plan and set-up, all containers can be watered at once. A timer can do the job while you are on vacation. Be sure the system provides the correct amount of water to each container in the same time period.

What to Grow

FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE

- For a single season (annuals)
- Plant a showstopper
 - All one variety or color or a single specimen
- Grow an arrangement combining
 - Thrillers (upright; spikes)
 - Spillers (vining; trailing)
 - Fillers (spreading; bushy)

VEGGIES AND HERBS

- The more sun the better!
- Patio or bush varieties work best
- Some veggies need more room to grow. Choose your container accordingly.
- Veggies for containers include:
 - Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant
 - Potatoes, carrots, onions
 - Beans and peas
 - Squash and cucumbers ,
 - Lettuce, spinach, microgreens
 - Early spring; repeat in late summer

Winter Care of Containers

WINTER CARE OF YOUR CONTAINERS

- Bring indoors: terra cotta, plastic, resin
- Tarp: concrete & stone
- Leave outside full of soil: wood



More Information

Horticulture Resources:

- Hort.extension.wisc.edu
- Learningstore.extension.wisc.edu

County Horticulture Helplines for Gardening Questions:

- Milwaukee – 608-298-6945 or planthealth.advisors@extension.wisc.edu
- Waukesha – 262-548-7779 or uwex1@waukeshacounty.gov

Local County Extension Offices:

- Milwaukee.extension.wisc.edu
- Waukesha.extension.wisc.edu

Wisconsin Master Gardener Program:

- mastergardener.extension.wisc.edu

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Successful Container Gardening

Select • Plant • Maintain



Container Choices

Plants can be grown in almost anything that holds "soil" and has drainage holes.

DRAINAGE

- Allow outdoor containers to drain freely
- Remove attached saucers
- Do not let planters sit in drainage water
- "Pot feet" hold containers off patios and prevent staining

SIZE

- Pots should be big enough for the plant's roots and the right size for the location
- Small pots dry out quickly
- Large ones hold moisture longer but can be heavy



TYPES

- **Porous containers** like terracotta, cocoa fiber and cloth dry out quickly
- **Plastic and glazed pots** are not porous so hold moisture longer
- **Stone and concrete** are not porous but even small ones can be heavy
- **Wood** retains moisture but decomposes in a couple of years. Wood can carryover diseases.
- **Others:** bamboo, resin, woven
- **Or just use the bag the soil comes in!**
 - Poke a few holes for drainage
 - Lay flat or stand upright

TIPS

- ♦ Use plastic with drainage holes inside of decorative porous pots and fiber-lined planters to retain water longer
- ♦ Use less soil in large, heavy containers by placing plastic or mesh bags filled with recycled cans, bottles, or packing peanuts in the bottom. Weight with rocks or bricks if top-heavy
- ♦ Double potting uses a large, decorative outer pot (drainage optional) with the smaller planting pot (with drainage) propped up inside

Soil Selections



WHAT TO USE:

Soil-less mix, sometimes referred to as "container soil" mix. Ingredients are lightweight and provide several benefits.

- The ingredients used hold moisture and nutrients plus make air spaces for oxygen
- May include compost, peat moss, coir (coconut fiber), perlite, vermiculite, and sand
- Water holding granules (polymers) added to the mix only keep plants from wilting for slightly longer - can be expensive
- Fertilizers are sometimes added in the mix. They provide nutrients slowly throughout the typical growing season. If they're not added, you can add it yourself (see next panel).

WHAT NOT TO USE

- Soil from the garden even if mixed with other components
- Top soil alone or potting soil alone
- Sand since it makes soil dry out faster

MAKE YOUR OWN MIX

Use equal amounts of compost or top soil, peat or coir and perlite or vermiculite)

ABOUT "USED" SOIL MIX

- Best to use new soil every year
- Prevent carryover diseases
- Prevent salt buildup
- More practically, replace only half every year unless plants had diseases (i.e. tomatoes)

WHAT TO DO WITH "USED" SOIL MIX

- Add it to compost pile
- Work it into garden beds
- Top-dress your lawn
- Add it under your shrubs or trees

Fertilize Frequently

Containers need to be fertilized frequently.

Nutrients - The numbers are the percentages of nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium (N-P-K)

- **Nitrogen** helps leaves and stems grow. Since it dissolves in water it runs out in drainage water. Fertilize containers often to replace N. Too much N can reduce or prevent flowering.
- **Phosphorus** encourages blooms and root growth and amount may be twice the amount of N or more
- **Potassium** helps plants resist diseases
- **Minor and trace nutrients** are also in most fertilizers

TYPES

- **Liquid and soluble** are easiest - they are mixed and applied when watering
- **Granular** ones are cheapest but not available to plants as fast. These should be mixed in before planting.
- **Coated fertilizers** (i.e. Osmocote) are slowly dissolved by water and feed over 3, 6 or 9 months
- **Spikes** pushed into the soil gradually dissolve but can be expensive

HOW MUCH / HOW OFTEN

- Combine coated fertilizer (slow-release variety) mixed in the "soil" with a liquid or soluble fertilizer once a month
- Or without the coated fertilizer, use liquid or soluble fertilizer every other time you water

