

# What to Grow In Containers

## FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE

- In sun or shade?
- For a single season
- Or perennial (need winter protection)
- 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 save space
- Veggies with roots that need room (5-gallons or more):
  - Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant
  - Potatoes, carrots, onions
  - Beans and peas
  - Squash and cucumbers
- Short-season crops need less:
  - Lettuce, spinach, microgreens
  - Early spring; repeat in late summer

## HARDY BLUEBERRIES

- Half-high varieties: 'Northsky', 'Northland', and 'North Country', and 'Top Hat'
- Need winter protection for roots
- Use a loamy soil mix with extra peat (not coir) and sulfur
- In 5-gallon to half whiskey barrel-sized pots (see UWEX pub. XHT1196)

## STRAWBERRIES

- Day-neutral for one season; 'Tribute', 'Tristar'.
- Everbearing for two with winter protection of roots; 'Fort Laramie', 'Ozark Beauty'.

**APPLES:** colonnade and spur types.

## TREES AND SHRUBS

- Small scale ornamental trees
  - Japanese maples
  - Tree roses
- Specimen shrubs & vines
  - Shrub roses
  - Rhododendrons (need acid soil)
  - Clematis
- Topiary evergreens
- Columnar fruit trees

# Winter Care

## WINTER CARE OF YOUR CONTAINERS

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

## OVERWINTERING PERENNIALS, HERBS, FRUITS, TREES AND SHRUBS

- "Heel-in" to vacant ground beds so pot is below ground, then mound with mulch
- In an attached garage, in a tub or box, stuffed with mulch or insulation
- Large, heavy containers left in place year round
  - \* Line inside with foam insulation before planting
  - \* Or surround pots & plants with straw once soil has frozen

# For More Information



www.hort.uwex.edu  
UW-Extension Horticulture & Wisconsin Garden Factsheets

www.learningstore.uwex.edu  
UW-Extension Publications



## Horticulture Helplines (UW-Extension)

**Milwaukee Co.** Mon – Wed 9:00 – 12:00  
(414) 256-4664

**Waukesha Co.** Mon – Fri 9:00 – 12:00  
(262) 548-7779

## Horticulture Center (UW-Extension)

At Boerner Botanical Gardens  
(414) 525-5638

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# Successful Container Gardening

Select • Plant • Maintain



**Convenient & Creative**  
**Grow flowers, vegetables, herbs and more!**  
**With better soil**  
**Wherever you want them**  
**In sunny spots or shade**  
**On balconies and in small spaces**  
**Move them around**  
**Change flower displays for the seasons**

**Accessible....**  
**.... Easy-to-reach hanging baskets**  
**.... Sit or stand to save your back and knees**



## 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.

**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

**Container "soil" mixes are usually "soilless" to be lightweight and cheaper.**

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 in the mix provide nutrients slowly throughout the typical growing season. Buy pre-mixed or add it yourself. (See next panel)

### WHAT NOT TO USE

**Not soil from the garden** even if mixed with other components.

**Not top soil alone.** (See below)

**Not bagged products** called garden soil or planting soil. These are for ground beds not containers.

**Not 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

Best to use new soil every year

- Prevent carryover diseases
- Prevent salt buildup.

More practically, replace only every couple of years or replace only half every year unless plants had diseases (i.e. tomatoes).

### WHAT TO DO WITH "USED" SOIL

Add it to compost pile

Work it into garden beds

Topdress your lawn

## 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. 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.

**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

Combine coated fertilizer 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.

## 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.