



Virginia Green Industry Council

For Immediate Use

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Electronic Version:
www.viriniagreen.org

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BLOOMING BEYOND YARD SPACE

You don't need a yard to have a garden to be proud of. Container gardening offers a myriad of planting possibilities for the patio, deck, balcony or window box, according to Lin Diacont, President of the Virginia Green Industry Council. And even if you do have a yard, don't limit your gardening to ground level. Take it from the experts at the Virginia Green Industry Council plants can go anywhere that soil, water, light and imagination can go.

Flowers are blooming in everything from the traditional clay pot to elegant, handmade containers, wheel barrows, cast iron kettles and wooden wine casks cut in half. Barrel containers can be half buried on their sides with soil mounded inside so it looks as if the flowers are "spilling" out. Decks can be built with window-box railings or cubicles to cover large pots. Use your imagination to plant what you find-an old stone barbecue grill cooking with coleus, an abandoned sand box with castles of celosia, an outgrown swing set swinging with hanging geraniums pots. Transform a "white elephant" in your yard into a blooming focal point.

Containers not only let you enjoy plants in non-yard locations, they also give you the flexibility to move and change. If you leave plants in their original pots and just set them inside their decorative containers, they can be easily replaced with fresh substitutes. If you fill the planter with decorative mulch to cover the pot rims, your plants look as if they were planted directly into the container. You can use this mobile method to keep sun-loving plants in a shady area. Buy two sets of plants and rotate them every week or two, so they get enough sun to thrive. You can also rotate plants just for the fun of it. For seasonal variety try colorful, fragrant hyacinths, crocuses, daffodils and tulips in spring.

Replace the faded bulbs with a dramatic summer annual such as geraniums. Move the pansies or violas to a centerpiece cluster on your patio table and replace them with dangling vinca vines around the geraniums. For planters in shady areas, big pots of impatiens are an impressive sight. In the fall, the geraniums can make way for mums with their variety of colors and flower forms.

You can add another dimension to your planter by using a small, woody ornamental plant as the focal point surrounded by annuals. For example, a lush, pink azalea floating on a sea of white impatiens,-or a dark, green yew encircled by red wax begonias. Ask your garden center about the hardiness of such shrubs. If they won't survive your climate's winters, they will have to be over-wintered in a greenhouse. Did you know that many commercial ranges now rent out space?

Let your imagination run wild with planter possibilities-but don't forget the practical considerations. Containers have special water needs due to their limited size. First, they dry out more quickly than garden beds. This is particularly true of porous, clay pots, hanging baskets, plants in full sun and small containers. Check watering needs daily.

Second, containers require drainage to prevent waterlogged roots. The best alternative is holes in the bottom of the container with a layer of burlap to keep soil from sifting through. Better than nothing is a layer of coarse gravel or broken pots at the bottom of the pot with burlap over the gravel to keep soil out so water can drain to the spaces between the stones. Another option is to place a drainage-hole container inside a larger, decorative container-but make sure the inner pot is elevated so it doesn't sit in the water that has drained into the larger pot. When choosing plants for your container, consider the following:

Light -Most flowers are sun-lovers. If you're decorating a shady spot, try impatiens, begonias, coleus, browallia, fuchsia or torenia. Check plant care tags and buy with your location in mind-or rotate containers to a sunny spot as suggested above.

Height -Put tall plants in the center of containers viewed from all sides, or the rear of ones viewed from one side only. Use shorter plants in the middle and low or trailing varieties at the edge.

Distance -One-color-one-variety planters make a dramatic showing even when viewed from afar. Combination plantings of several different varieties make for up-close interest.

When planting your container, follow these tips:

- Use a soil-less planting medium. Garden soil is too heavy for containers and may carry insects and disease.
- Water before planting.
- Mix until the soil is uniformly moist and filled to about a half-inch of the pot rim.
- Check watering needs daily. Containers dry faster than garden beds.
- Turn planters for symmetrical growth. Plants "lean" toward the light. Keep the sunny side from outgrowing the shady side by turning pots periodically.
- Fertilize lightly but frequently. Use a water soluble plant food according to label directions. Make sure it is well diluted or it may "burn" your plants.

Time to start casting about for the perfect planter for your non-yard garden. Your local garden center has loads of alternatives. Those that are decorative on their own and others that are just the right size to fit into that wicker chair without a seat, that brass umbrella stand, that wooden apple crate ...You know what it is; plant it!

Go to our consumer website for additional gardening information at www.VirginiaGardening.com

The Virginia Green Industry Council is the voice of the horticulture industry in the Commonwealth and is dedicated to enhancing the beauty of the state's environment, the well-being of our citizens, improving our state's economy, and improving the health and wellness for everyone in Virginia. The Council is made up of providers and consumers of horticultural products and services. The Council works to provide public and industry education, environmental guidelines and other information that will keep Virginia green and growing. For more information, visit www.viriniagreen.org. 540-382-0943 FAX: 540-382-2716

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