

Container gardening

The versatile and easy way to garden

By Kate Parham

WHETHER YOU LIVE in a small apartment or an expansive farmhouse on dozens of acres, container gardening is a great way to create spots of color and add life to your home.

It's also easier and less time consuming than traditional gardening, says Fern Richardson, Costco member and author of *Small-Space Container Gardens* (Timber Press, 2012). "And you avoid a multitude of problems: weeds, spreading disease, damage from insects and maintain[ing] moisture," says Mary Moss-Sprague, certified Master Gardener and author of *Stand Up and Garden* (Countryman Press, 2012). Convinced yet?

The Costco Connection

Get your own containers growing with pots, plants and potting mix, all available at Costco.

"Any plant will do well in a container as long as you know what kind of care that plant requires," says Barbara Wise, Costco member and author of *Container Gardening for All Seasons* (Cool Springs Press, 2012). There is a short list of plants that don't do well in containers: large trees. That's it! Even plants that do require more room, such as lemons, come

in dwarf varieties, perfect for small spaces.

As with any garden, you must consider sunlight. "Black mondo grass is a great option for balconies lacking sunlight," says Richardson. Wise suggests planting a 'Crimson Queen' Japanese maple, with perennials, such as heuchera, or annual flowers, such as impatiens, underneath. Low-maintenance plants include succulents such as cacti and tropical plants such as mandevilla, allamanda or crotons. Moss-Sprague encourages edible gardens. Cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, beets, leeks, celery, salad greens, tomatoes, potatoes and herbs all grow well in containers.

Fortunately, there's no right or wrong answer when it comes to choosing containers, "it's just a matter of matching the plant with a pot that is large enough, but not too large, for the plant's root system," says Richardson. Any size or shape can work, as well as most materials, adds Moss-Sprague, as long as the proportions match. Fiberglass or plastic pots, which are lighter and easier to maneuver, if necessary, are good choices for balconies.

When it comes to combining multiple plants in one pot, make sure all the plants sharing a pot require similar sun and watering requirements. Moss-Sprague agrees: "It'll be much easier to maintain them if [plants] are grouped according to shared characteristics and growing condition preferences," she says. "For example, basil, oregano, thyme, chives and rosemary happily share space together."

For an attractive appearance, try this universally accepted gardening formula: thriller, filler, spiller. Combine a "thriller" plant with

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Inspired to create your own?

If so, consider entering a photo in our Best Container contest. Use your imagination to put together a pot with primarily flowers, edibles, grasses or succulents, or a combination as the theme of your arrangement. We'll select one winner for each of these five themes.



MULTIALLY INTERNATIONAL

Winners will be selected based on originality and creativity by a panel of judges whose decisions will be final. Each winner will receive one \$250 Costco Cash card. Winning entries may be featured in a future issue of *The Costco Connection*.

All entries must be received by September 1, 2012. Winners will be determined by January 2013. Email one (1) high-resolution photo and a short write-up along with your Costco membership number to: Connection@costco.com, with "Container Contest" in the subject line, or mail to Container Contest, P.O. Box 34088, Seattle, WA 98124.

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height and visual impact, such as canna, with full, bushy “filler” plants, such as day lily, and “spiller” plants, such as petunias, to cascade over the edges and soften the container, suggests Wise. And, she says, “Remember to mix in fine foliage with your big foliage and to add a little repetition or echo of color among the plants that are used to add cohesiveness to the planting.”

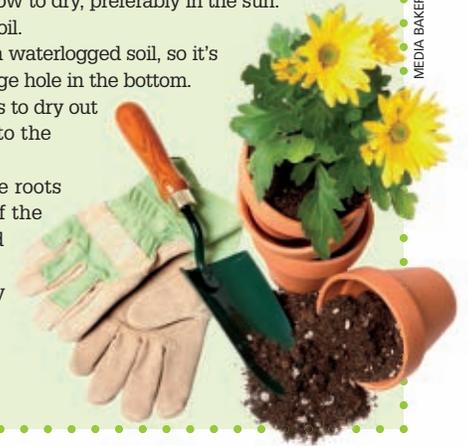
Ornamental grasses are another impressive way to add dimension to a pot, especially one with perennials, says Moss-Sprague. If

you’re going the edible route, she suggests stacking a bright-red cherry tomato plant in the middle of a large, high pot, and surrounding it with scallions and herbs to create unique color combos. Another common rule of thumb: Keep the height of the flowers less than one and a half times the height of the pot used for the arrangement. 📌

Kate Parham (www.kateparham.com) is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance writer.

Container care tips from the experts

1. Never use a dirty container: Harmful organisms can linger on the inside. Rinse it with ¼ cup of chlorine bleach and 1 gallon of water. Allow to dry, preferably in the sun.
2. Start with a quality soil mix, not garden or topsoil.
3. Ensure adequate drainage. Few plants thrive in waterlogged soil, so it's important that containers have at least one drainage hole in the bottom.
4. Provide sufficient water. Soil in containers tends to dry out quickly. To test, stick your finger in the soil up to the second knuckle. If it's dry, water. If it's wet, wait.
5. Know when to repot. “It's time when you see roots poking out of the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot, [or] if you stick your finger into the soil and [it's] completely full of fibrous roots,” says author Fern Richardson, who provides two easy steps to repotting. First, remove the plant and loosen its roots; if you're reusing it, trim off 25 percent of the roots. Second, add fresh soil and place the plant in the new pot.—KP



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