

# CONTAINERIZED GARDENING

Recommended by Mark Schultz, Mayfield Nursery  
and Grower of Hardy Herbaceous "Green Select" Perennials

**A few good hardy varieties to consider:**

## ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

Acorus variegatus  
Calamagrostis – Karl Foerster (perennial plant of the year)  
Overdam  
Elymus Glaucus  
Blue Fescue  
Blue Oat  
Miscanthus Purpurascens (flame)  
Miscanthus Silverfeder  
Miscanthus (porcupine)

### Coreopsis

Moonbeam  
Rosea  
Rosea Alba

### Sedum

Autumn Joy  
Matrona

### Dianthus

Bath Pink  
Spotty  
Tiny Rubies

### Campanula

Blue Clip  
White Clips  
Rotundifolia

### Perouskia

Longin

### Lamium

Beacon Silver  
Chequers  
White nancy

### Digitalis

Excelsior

### Lysmachia

Creeping jenny  
Aurea

### Hosta

Many varieties

# MOON AND FRAGRANCE GARDEN

The idea behind this container garden is to grow plants that can be experienced at night. White flowers shine under moonlight and many are very fragrant.

The challenge of designing a white garden is the many shades of white flowers and foliage that exist. Only plants in the same shade of white can be combined. An off-white flower next to a bright-white flower will look dingy. In this garden, I tried to choose only bright-white flowers and foliage plants.

The following is a list of the plants selected for this container garden. This garden was grown in full sun and warm temperatures.

- ◆ **Nicotiana sylvestris:** flowering tobacco, very fragrant
- ◆ **Cleome Hasslerana:** spider flower, white pompom-like flowers
- ◆ **Cosmos Bipinnatus ‘versailles:’** good foliage contrast to Nicotiana, plus nice daisy-like flowers
- ◆ **Antirrhinum majus ‘rocket:’** snapdragon, fun to watch bees climb inside flowers
- ◆ **Perilla frutescens:** excellent purple foliage plant, good contrast to white flowers
- ◆ **Datura Meteloides:** amazing 8” trumpet shaped flowers with a rich, strong fragrance and blue/gray foliage (caution: poisonous)
- ◆ **Euphorbia marginata:** beautiful white variegated foliage plant (caution: poisonous)
- ◆ **Basil ‘purple ruffles:’** also nice color contrast
- ◆ **Pelargonium x hortorum ‘orbit:’** geranium, the foliage was more yellowish than I preferred
- ◆ **Pelargonium peltatum:** ivy geranium, in hanging basket
- ◆ **Helichrysum microphyllum:** also sold as Helichrysum petiolare ‘minus,’ beautiful silver foliage plant, trailing habit
- ◆ **Verbena x hybrida ‘romance:’** nice trailing habit
- ◆ **Silene alpestris ‘snowball:’** little white flowers, trailing habit
- ◆ **Lobularia Maritima:** sweet alyssum, both lavender and white varieties, fragrant

Source: <http://www.anet-chi.com/>

# BUTTERFLY AND HUMMINGBIRD GARDEN

The hummingbirds just love **red ivy geranium** and the butterflies love '**Big Red**' **Zinnia**. Other butterfly favorites in a container are **Cosmos Bipinnatus 'Red Versailles,'** which is a bright purple pink instead of red, and **Verbena x hybrida 'Romance.'**

A real butterfly favorite is **bronze fennel**. Black swallowtails circle around these plants all summer long. It is great fun watching the caterpillars devour these plants.

More annuals that are claimed to attract butterflies:

- ◆ **Agastache cana 'Heather Queen'**
- ◆ **Ageratum houstonianum**
- ◆ **Asclepias cruassavica 'Sunset'**
- ◆ **Carthamus tinctorius:** orange safflower
- ◆ **Cosmos sulphureus**
- ◆ **Gomphrena haageana 'Red Embers:'** globe amaranth
- ◆ **Helianthus annuus:** sunflower
- ◆ **Heliotropium arborescens:** heliotrope
- ◆ **Lantana camara:** lantana
- ◆ **Lobularia maritima:** sweet alyssum
- ◆ **Nicotiana glauca:** flowering tobacco
- ◆ **Petunia x hybrida:** common garden petunia
- ◆ **Phacelia campanularia**
- ◆ **Tagetes patula:** french marigold
- ◆ **Tithonia rotundifolia:** mexican sunflower
- ◆ **Rudbeckia hirta:** annual cone flower
- ◆ **Salvia**
- ◆ **Scabiosa atropurpurea:** pincushion flower

Here are some annuals to try to attract hummingbirds:

- ◆ **Cleome hassleriana:** cleome, spider flower
- ◆ **Fuchsia x hybrida:** fuchsia
- ◆ **Impatiens wallerana:** impatiens
- ◆ **Ipomoea x multifida:** cardinal climber
- ◆ **Ipomoea purpurea:** morning glory
- ◆ **Mina lobata:** firecracker vine, exotic love vine
- ◆ **Nepeta x faassenii:** catnip
- ◆ **Petunia x hybrida:** common petunia (red varieties)
- ◆ **Phaseolus coccineus:** bean blossom
- ◆ **Salvia coccinea**
- ◆ **Tropaeolum majus:** nasturtium

# TYPES OF CONTAINERS

- ◆ Size is one of the most important considerations when planting in pots. Generally the larger the container the less watering it will require. Larger pots are also heavier to move around so if you like to rearrange your patio during the summer you might try some of the light weight terra cotta imitation pots that are available now. You could also put large pots on stands with wheels for rolling about.
- ◆ Clay does tend to dry out faster, but it is a natural material that breathes. Wooden whiskey barrels make great pots. They are large enough for small gardens of herbs, vegetables, annuals, and perennials. Many plants can be successfully over-wintered in large barrels since the wood doesn't crack and the depth is adequate for the root systems.
- ◆ Consider the scale of the space when choosing containers. Small balconies would quickly be filled up with a couple of big pots. On the other hand a large patio needs some substantial pots to help balance the size.
- ◆ Choosing a style, material or color to form the overall impression and then mixing in other types can be interesting. For instance use many clay pots but mix the designs (cherubs, garlands, plain, etc.), choose blue pots in various materials and styles will keep the continuity of the potted garden while remaining interesting and fresh.

## CHOOSING PLANTS

- ◆ If the balcony faces south, choose plants that will tolerate a lot of sun. Look for annuals like portulaca, petunias, and heliotrope that thrive in sunny conditions. On the other hand, recognize how much shade your patio under the oak tree really gets and look for annuals like lobelia, impatiens, fuchsias, or begonias.

## COLOR

- ◆ Choose complimentary colors and hues. Blues, pinks and purples make nice combinations as do bright yellows, oranges and reds. White is an excellent choice for many color combinations – it softens the bright colors, adds as a contrast, blends different colors to create a pleasing overall effect. White stands out at night, so if you use your patio for relaxing in the moonlight, add some plants with white blooms and light, silvery leaves for a natural evening glow.

## ARRANGING THE POTS

- ◆ One pot on its own can look pretty lonely. Grouping of pots can create the image of lush gardens in the tropics. Many pots lining the steps of decks soften the edges.
- ◆ Defining an edge or taking the sharpness off of a corner of a building or fence is easily achieved with the placement of a good sized potted plant. Tall pots, wide barrels and planters can be arranged to fill an entire corner of a deck.
- ◆ Containers bulging out from balcony walls can create instant paths on an otherwise linear deck.
- ◆ Don't forget about height in your arrangement. One trick is to put a pot on an old chair or overturned pot.

Source: <http://www.gardenforever.com>

## Soil

- ◆ Soil in containers needs to be fairly light but also rich. For ease of use and convenience, you can buy one of the special potting soil mixes from the nursery to ensure that you get a good mix of peat moss, vermiculite or perlite, and nutrients. These are sterile mixes so they do not contain any living microorganisms, weeds, insects or diseases.
- ◆ Linda Yang, The City & Town Gardener, offers her own recipe for mixing potting soil: 1 part topsoil (available from local nurseries), 1 part lightener (perlite or vermiculite) and 1 part conditioner (peat moss) along with a handful of fertilizer granules for every 6 inches of pot height and a scoop of cow manure for every 6 inches.
- ◆ In subsequent years break up the old soil and remove about half. Then top-up and mix in new soil and fertilizer. A granular slow release fertilizer works well for plants that are closely packed into containers and fighting for air, water and nutrients.

## Watering Tips

- ◆ Make sure the pot has a drainage hole. If it is clay or wood, you can drill a hole.
- ◆ If the pot is sitting on a concrete balcony floor, raise it up on feet made out of clay or plastic. Flat pieces of brick or small squares of wood will also work.
- ◆ If you use a saucer under your pot, don't let water stand in it.
- ◆ Before putting soil in the pot when planting, place a small piece of mesh or broken clay pot over the hole so that soil doesn't escape. Don't entirely cover the hole but leave enough space for the water to drain. Some gardeners recommend using an old tea bag over the hole.
- ◆ Remember potted plants can dry very quickly in the sun and wind. Small pots can totally dry out in as little as a few hours.
- ◆ Do the finger test. Stick your finger into the soil up to the second knuckle to tell if the soil is moist.
- ◆ It's hard to over water outdoor pots that have good drainage. Many potted gardens need watering every day.
- ◆ Group your pots. The larger display can be more showy and watering is easier in a large group.
- ◆ Moisture retention granules are great for holding the water and then slowly releasing it back into the soil as it dries out. Remember to place granules about 2" below the surface so that the water is released to the roots where it is needed.

## Making Containers Light Weight

If you garden on a balcony or roof deck, the weight of the container should be kept to a minimum. It's easier to position pots that don't weigh too much and it's cheaper for soil if you can lighten the load.

- ◆ In large containers, layer the bottom with styrofoam chips or plastic seedling pots that are crumpled up. This fills up the pot a little where soil isn't needed and makes the final planted container lighter weight. This trick is good for annuals that don't send down deep roots and never use the soil a foot below the surface.
- ◆ It's a good idea to place a bit of fabric cloth over the plastic layer so the soil doesn't escape into the lower level.
- ◆ Use a lightweight soil mixture to keep weight down. Mixtures are available with perlite or vermiculite in them or you can mix in up to 1/3 of vermiculite in with potting soil.

- ◆ Consider the weight of the actual pot. While cast iron pots, stone troughs and concrete urns are gorgeous, keep them for the patio garden where they can remain in place over the summer.
- ◆ Plastic is by far the lightest material if you like to rearrange your pots regularly or if weight is a concern on a roof deck.
- ◆ Clay is traditional but tends to crack if left out in the winter. If you live in an apartment and don't have a potting shed, the new plastic terra-cotta imitations might be the right choice. The best plastic versions are pretty expensive, often as much as clay, but they will last forever and you can leave them outside all season. As they are becoming more popular, cheaper versions can be found at many nurseries in the spring.

Source: [www.gardenforever.com](http://www.gardenforever.com)

## Vegetable Gardening in Containers or Window Boxes

For those of us who have limited gardening space, a patio, balcony, or windowsill can be a great location for an Italian herb and vegetable garden. Most primavera vegetables can be grown in containers with success.

- ◆ Use good potting soil and set the containers in a location that receives at least six hours of sunlight a day. No extra fertilizer is needed if your potting soil is already fortified, but if the leaves of your plants start to look yellow or pale, you may need to feed them once a month or so. Also provide them with plenty of water and proper drainage to prevent root rot.
- ◆ Clay pots are heavier and require more water, but plastic pots can be less attractive and warm the soil too much if dark in color, so use your own judgement. As for size, an ideal pot would be one large enough to hold several plants, but not so large that its weight could collapse a balcony. Into a 24" wide pot, you can fit one large tomato plant, one bush squash plant, or three dwarf peppers, and still have some room for a few herb plants around the edges.
- ◆ Many specifically developed hybrid vegetable varieties are available for container gardening. Read the descriptions of each in seed catalogs for planting conditions.

## Vegetables to Grow in Containers

### ◆ Tender Tomatoes

There are many varieties, so be sure that the type you've selected will meet your needs. If enough room is available, a half whiskey barrel (available at many garden centers) will provide enough soil and support for almost any tomato variety.

### ◆ Peppers

Sweet peppers have nearly the same growing culture as tomatoes – they require a little less space, but need the same amount of fertilizer and plenty of sun.

### ◆ Summer Squash

Summer squash, including zucchini, take up quite a bit of growing space but produce an abundance of fruit. If grown in a large container (like a half barrel or 24" pot) and allowed to sprawl over your patio, these plants will provide plenty of squash for your table. Some compact hybrids, like 'Raven,' 'Yellow Bush Scallop,' and 'Peter Pan,' have been developed for gardeners with limited space. Harvest each squash when it reaches a length of six to eight inches. These smaller-sized veggies have smaller seeds and tend to be sweeter. Continuous harvesting of summer squash induces more fruit from the vines.

#### ◆ Carrots

Some varieties, such as ‘Thumbelina,’ ‘Chantenay Supreme,’ or ‘Kundulus’ are stubby enough to grow in compact soils. Carrots make a fine neighbor for tomatoes in the container using a half whiskey barrel which is filled with a rich loam. That will allow them to reach their full potential. Other containers can be used, but the variety of carrot should be sized to fit the depth. Some hybrids will only grow two or three inches long, so they can be grown in smaller pots or even a window box. Harvest carrots when they are bright orange in color and reach the approximate size typical for the variety you’re growing.

#### ◆ Onion and Garlic

Both these bulbous plants are easy to grow and also deter some insect pests. Onion varieties come in long-or short-day types. Long-day onions perform better in Northern gardens. Some varieties require as many as 120 days for full development, so be sure to plant onion sets as soon as the ground can be worked in early spring. Harvest onion and garlic bulbs in fall when the tops have turned brown and dry. I’ve had some good harvests of both onions and garlic from containers. Extra water will help them grow to a reasonable size for use in the kitchen, and a container of four or five inches deep for one bulb is big enough for proper root development.

#### ◆ Herbs of Italy

Herbs like oregano, parsley, and basil can all be grown in pots or containers. They can be grown alone or together. Six-inch pots allow plenty of room for individual herbs, or a twelve-inch pot can be used to plant them all together. They can be grown in pots year-round if they get enough sunlight.

Source: [www.naturalland.com](http://www.naturalland.com)

## Window Boxes

Making a window-scape should be elementary: Add flora to a container and douse with water regularly. Let your plant choices reflect your personality – a box featuring colorful blooms has a different appeal than one brimming with tall grasses. Here’s how to create a landscape on your ledge this spring.

### Flora

- ◆ **Sure things:** Some flowers, like impatiens, begonias or petunias, grow better in boxes than others.
- ◆ **Site specific:** “How well a plant or flower grows depends on the climate and the amount of sun exposure.” Many garden sites offer questionnaires to help you pinpoint the plants that will grow best in your specific conditions.
- ◆ **Going green:** Using ivy, grass, groundcover, or even fern alone can give an unexpected, sophisticated look to a window box. (They look expert-ish, but they’re actually easier to maintain than flowers.)
- ◆ **Mixology:** Mix it up a bit with a few variations of plants and flowers. More important than making colors matchy-matchy is fullness. So plant lots and lots. Add vines and you’ll get that cascading look – the coveted window-box prize.
- ◆ **Care and feeding:** Most window box plants are ready to just plant and only need water. But ingenious products like EZ Potting Soil – compact disks of soil that expand when wet and store the water for later – is helpful in case you forget to water them here or there. Also, remember that floral creatures, no matter how low maintenance, demand preening in order to continue flowering. So, pick off the dead leaves and petals.

## Containers

- ◆ **Getting creative:** Garden stores have traditional boxes made of wood, terra cotta and plastic. But unconventional containers work well, too: aquariums, coffee cans, rubber boots, tea cups and even the drawers of cast-off bureaus. If you're planting in wood boxes or something more unorthodox, avoid planting directly into your container (unless its material is very porous). Instead, use plastic liners inside the outside container.

Source: <http://picky.oxygen.com>

## Garden Humor

- ◆ A perfect summer day is when the sun is shining, the breeze is blowing, the birds are singing, and the lawn mower is broken.     -*James Dent*
- ◆ Why don't you ever iron a four-leaf clover? You might press your luck.   - *Elaine Valvezan*
- ◆ What lives in winter, dies in summer, and grows with its root upward? An icicle.
- ◆ What do you call it when worms take over the world? Global Worming.
- ◆ There's one good thing about snow, it makes your lawn look as nice as your neighbor's.     - *Clyde Moore*
- ◆ What vegetable might you find in your basement? Cellar-y.   - *Emily Kianka*
- ◆ What is green and goes to a summer camp? A Brussels' scout.
- ◆ What do you get if you cross a four leaf clover with poison ivy? A rash of good luck.
- ◆ "Yup, gardening and laughing are two of the best things in life you can do to promote good health and a sense of well being."   - *David Hobson, The Mad Gardener*
- ◆ What do you call a grumpy and short tempered gardener?     A SnapDragon.
- ◆ Life expectancy would grow by leaps and bounds if green vegetables smelled as good as bacon.     - *Doug Larson*
- ◆ I have a rock garden. Last week three of them died.     - *Richard Diran*
- ◆ What kind of flowers do you give to King Tut?     Chrysanthemummies.

## Definitions

Dust: Mud with the juice squeezed out.

Mosquito: An insect that makes you like flies better.

Raisin: A grape with a sunburn.

Source: [www.gardendigest.com](http://www.gardendigest.com)

# Window Boxes and Container Gardening

March 2001

Every garden is unique with a multitude of choices in soils, plants and themes. Finding your garden theme is as easy as seeing what brings a smile to your face.

Theresa Watkins, Gardening With Soul

## Member Materials

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