

## CREATING UPRIGHT CONTAINERS

It's easy to take part in this hot trend

These days, yards are getting smaller; gardening space is getting tinier, and for most of us, time is getting more and more limited. All of these factors have driven the hot new trend of vertical or upright gardening—growing gardens up, instead of out.

The good news is that creating a container garden isn't hard. We'll give you some tips on choosing the right container, plants and how to care for it. The design possibilities are endless; but you don't have to be a floral designer to mix and match the plants you like.

You can choose anything from tomatoes or lettuce to small shrubs like hibiscus, stately ornamental grasses such as purple fountain grass, or—if you've got a trellis or fence for them to climb—vines. Herbs, vegetables, bedding plants, perennials, shrubs and fruits: you can contain them all.



Jennifer D. White

No blooms necessary. A cactus stands as the main focal point of this desert-style container design, while smaller, more compact plants act as fillers at the base.



Bill Calkins

For low-maintenance and drought-tolerant containers, try a mix of succulent plants.



Jennifer D. White

Cannas—the tall, broad-leaved plants featured in these containers—add a great tropical feel to any design. Even after they bloom, the striking foliage is sure to attract attention.



Each issue, *Green Profit* organizes a ready-made handout on livegood and hardgood topics in the form of a magazine page you can tear out, even giving it to customers who want questions answered, myths debunked and a reason to be in a garden environment, regardless of the season. You provide the customers and example products; we'll do the rest.

### How to Pick Your Plants

When it comes to picking plants, there are only two simple rules to follow: 1. Make sure you pick full-sun, partial-sun or shade plants, depending on where your container will be. Don't mix shade plants with full-sun plants. 2. Pick plants that are appropriate for the size of your container.

Other than that—have fun! Don't worry about right/wrong; do whatever *you* think looks good. And that might mean combining a red lettuce with a tall colorful foliage plant in the center or making a hibiscus the center of attention. You don't even have to think of just flowers; the leaves of some plants are so spectacular (and they last all summer long) that you won't even need a blossom to have an attractive container. Combination containers have trended towards a less cluttered look recently, and specimens (a single, large plant) have also become popular. But you can combine as many plants as the container's size allows.

Some tall plants you can look for: cannas, alocasia (a.k.a. elephant ear), colocasia, agave, and purple fountain grass. If you're interested in climbers, you'll need something for them to climb: a small trellis you put into the container, a larger trellis in the ground, a fence, or some other type of structure. Some interesting plants that'll creep up and make a vertical statement include clematis, black-eyed Susan vine, nasturtium, morning glories, sweet peas, moonflower, and trumpet vine.

Just because we're talking upright gardens doesn't mean everything has to be tall. You can still look to shorter, compact, or mounding plants such as coleus to provide filler and additional interest in your container.

### The Container

The biggest advice with containers is to make sure they have a proper drainage hole(s) in the bottom. Beyond that, you can choose from terra cotta, plastic, wood, glazed pottery, stoneware, metal, wire and some odd-ball creative container types. If it holds soil and drains water, it'll work. Do note, however, that unglazed

### Benefits of Upright Containers

- No digging necessary; containers can go anywhere—on a balcony, patio, deck, in the yard or even on the side of a fence.
- There's less weeding with containers than with in-the-ground beds.
- Vertical gardening can be easier for people with limited mobility, especially if you raise the height of the container or use a very tall container.
- Vertical gardening gives you the option of adding new design elements to your outdoor living space—creating privacy screens, dividing up space, concealing unwanted structures, or just enhancing the atmosphere.
- You can move your containers around to create different looks whenever the desire arises.
- You get to pick containers that fit your color scheme, décor and personality. And you can reuse those containers year after year.
- If you live in a region where you worry about early or late frosts, simply pull your containers out of the elements when there's a frost threat—giving you a longer season to enjoy the flowers.
- Vertical gardens tend to provide more air circulation amidst the plant foliage, which helps prevent diseases from occurring.

clay pots or terra cotta will dry out much more quickly than plastic. (The double-potting technique described under "planting" can help out with that.)

### The Soil

Make sure you pick up some potting soil or soilless medium for your container. (The dirt out of your garden will *not* do the trick; it won't drain fast enough.)

### The Planting

You can do one of two things: plant directly into the specialty container you bought or you can plant into a cheap plastic pot that you then slide inside a slightly larger decorative container. The second method can make it a bit easier, especially with the heavier pottery, when it comes to cleaning up at the end of the gardening season or when you want to switch out plantings.

### Container Care

The most important part of maintaining your container garden will be watering. While the weeding gets reduced with containers, watering often becomes more frequent. In fact, during hot and/or windy days, you may need to water once or twice a day. (There are, of course, a few tools to help out, including soil additives that help maintain moisture in the soil and irrigation gadgets. Ask your garden center about them.) Avoid letting the soil dry out in your container.

Plants in a container will also need a little more "food" than those in a fertile flower bed. You can buy soil with slow-release fertilizer already incorporated into it, you can add your own pellets of slow-release fertilizer, or you can apply a liquid fertilizer mixture regularly (usually once a week, depending on the fertilizer).

If, during the course of a summer, a plant in your container starts to look a little tired, feel free to pull it out and replace it with something else. And remember, one of the benefits of container gardening is that you can extend the season a bit by moving it into a protected area on nights when frost may be a threat. 🍃

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