

# CREATING HANGING BASKETS

A guide for designing, planting and caring for your own hanging baskets

There's more than one way to add vertical color to your porch or landscape. Tall plants make an obvious choice but so do hanging baskets. Whether you've got an expansive veranda to decorate or a tiny apartment balcony, a hanging basket gets plants up off the ground, to eye level or higher, and can add a burst of color where flower beds and patio containers can't.

Already-planted hanging baskets are easy to find in any garden center, but so are the materials needed to plant up your own hanging basket. Here, we'll give you an easy guide to creating your very own hanging basket; plus, you'll get tips for long-term care.

## Your Supplies

**1 A basket.** Now, you have a few options here, ranging from wood to plastic to wire frames. Most do-it-yourself basket planters usually have a wire frame with some sort of liner. Often, you can buy the wire part with an accompanying liner made of coco fiber, compressed sphagnum peat or sheet moss—all of which tend to be aesthetically pleasing. These liners are also sold separately, which is especially useful when you're reusing a basket.

As for size, the larger baskets will allow you to include more types of plants and will hold a greater amount of moisture to help you along through the hot summer months. You can further improve water retention by placing an additional poly liner or plastic saucer in the base of the basket, on top of the moss or fiber liner.



Photos: Jennifer D. White

This hanging basket includes petunias, heliotrope, blue fescue grass, calibrachoa, dichondra, dusty miller and angelonia.

In addition to wire baskets, you may find some fancy self-watering hanging baskets, standard plastic baskets and other designs that can fit your needs. Plastic containers tend to lose less moisture to evaporation than moss baskets, but many people prefer the visual appearance of the latter.

**2 The soil.** These days, you can buy specialty potting mixes for combination containers or hanging baskets, and some of these even have slow-release fertilizer incorporated into the mix (if this is the case, you won't need to follow the additional fertilizing suggestions we've included here). Many container experts will recommend that you fill about 20% of the container with organic matter, with the remaining part being a peat-based soil mix. This combination should help the mixture retain water better. You can also add a water-absorbing gel to the soil to improve moisture retention.



Each issue, *Green Profit* organizes a ready-made class 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.

Dr. Terri Starman, an expert in container design and an associate professor in horticulture at Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, offers these pointers for designing hanging baskets with multiple plants:

- Mixing color and textures are the two most important elements of designing a pleasing mixed basket.
- You can use all the same color of flowers as long as the texture of the plants is varied.
- Colored foliage will naturally make a mixed basket more interesting.
- The form of the plant is also important but it's easy to get it right. Just be sure to use mounding plants in the center of the basket and trailing plants on the outside edges.
- Vigorous growing plants work well and will not be overbearing if just one plant is used and placed in the center of the basket.
- Appealing combination baskets can be made with plants that are valued for just their foliage.
- Plants that have flowers on long stalks will stand up above the foliage and make a better impression than more compact bloomers.

potato vine); strobilanthes (Persian shield); plectranthus, helichrysum, and even Rex begonias.

You don't need to buy the traditional dracaena spike to add height to a basket. Ornamental grasses, which come in a large array of colors, sizes and textures, will also do the trick.

How many plants per basket will depend on a lot of factors. For example, you might try three or four plants in a small 10-in. basket. With a large, deep 16-in. moss basket, you could use as many as 10 small plants—and even more if you slit holes in the

**3 The plants.** Here's the really fun part. You get to mix and match to make a basket that fits your style. The most basic rule you need to remember is don't mix sun-loving and shade-loving plants in the same container; something won't be happy. If you want a basket that's going to last all summer long, look for plants that have a long bloom time and/or that withstand heat. For example, springtime flowers such as pansies won't do well once temperatures warm up.

You may want to look for a combination of mounding plants (for the center) and trailing plants (for the edge of the basket). And within these two categories, you can search for plants that have interesting or colorful foliage and ones that have striking blooms. Look for a variety of textures as well.

Lysimachia, bacopa, calibrachoa, muehlenbeckia (creeping wire vine), trailing petunia types, some verbenas, dichonera (also a foliage element), several geranium types, scaevola, and sutera all offer trailing elements.

Don't ignore foliage plants. In fact, these are the plants that'll look good and provide color no matter what. Some examples include coleus, which comes in every color and pattern imaginable; ipomoea (including sweet

sides and plant on the sidewall as well. Remember, if you start with smaller plants, you need to give them room to grow and fill out.

**4 Extras.** While you're shopping for the above, also consider the aforementioned water-absorbing gel or similar additives plus some type of fertilizer.

### Planting

**1** If you're using a wire basket that didn't come prelined, start by lining your basket with moss, coco fiber, or whatever type of lining you purchased. Next, fill the basket with a couple of inches of your compost/soil mixture. If you plan on planting the sides of a lined basket, here's when you'll need to cut small slits in the



lining at the soil level and either push the root ball from the outside in or gently wrap the foliage in a paper towel and push it through the hole from the inside out. (If you're just planting the top of a basket, skip down to the next step.)

**2** Continue to fill in more of your soil/compost mix until the basket is about two-thirds full. Plant the top. Place the more mounded or upright plants towards the center, with the trailing elements on the edges.

**3** Fill in the rest of the basket with your mix so that it covers the root balls of all the plants.

**4** Water thoroughly.

### Care

Most hanging baskets will need daily watering during the warm summer months.

In addition to water, plants also need adequate nutrition. You can provide this in several ways. As mentioned above, some potting mixes have fertilizer incorporated into them. You can also add a pellet form of slow-release fertilizer to the top of the basket after you've planted it. Check the directions to see how often you should reapply it. Alternatively, you can add a fertilizer to the water either daily or weekly. Most garden centers will recommend a multi-purpose 20-20-20 type liquid fertilizer. Again, follow directions for frequency and amount.

Depending on the plants you choose, you'll likely need to do a little routine maintenance of your basket from time to time if it has blooming plants. Deadheading, or picking off the spent blooms, will not only make your basket look better, but it will allow plants to bloom longer and more prolifically.

Finally, enjoy your creation. Plants add color, relaxation, and personality to our lives—take advantage of it! 🌿

BY JENNIFER DUFFIELD WHITE