

A great garden need not be rooted in the soil. A gardener's paradise full of aromatic herbs, fragrant flowers, vibrant perennial and annual color, and dwarf edible and ornamental trees can be cultivated in containers.

Not only does the container technique conserve the water necessary to infuse thirsty blossoms with color, but planting in containers allows for more accessibility, mobility, and diversification as well, giving you the freedom to change the look and feel of your garden while retaining year-round efflorescence. For instance, a seasonal potted plant may be positioned accordingly at the fore or back of the garden throughout the year. Likewise, you can transform certain isolated sections of your garden with container additions: flank entrances, patios, and decks, or fill areas with poor soil and vertebrate pest problems with potted plants. Adding attractive containers to a new or existing landscape produces an overall clean and polished finish.

Furthermore, containers add another means and method for imbuing your garden with unique, artistic touches. Since they are crafted into all shapes, sizes, materials, and finishes, endless options are available to fit your setting and style. Everything from redwood, cedar, and teak to terra-cotta, ceramic, concrete, plastic, and even fiberglass will serve. Terra-cotta and wood containers, however, tend to dry the soil substrate out faster than glazed ceramic, plastic, or fiberglass – especially when in direct sunlight for more than six hours. Darker colors may also absorb more heat and increase evapo-transpiration, thus requiring additional moisture.



CONTAINING ONE'S GARDEN

Wooden containers are convenient because they can be built to sizes and shapes that



PLANTED CONTAINERS AT CHERRY LANE NURSERY, ARROYO GRANDE

suit the location; however, rot and toxic wood treatments can be detrimental to your plants. Redwood and cedar, fairly rot resistant options, can be used without staining or painting. Look out for wood treated with creosote, penta, or other toxic compounds containing damaging vapors.

Once you've chosen the medium, you can get creative with the design. To create striking ornamental container combinations and to add dimension to your garden, place similar color and style containers in groupings of odd numbers with variable sizes. Place the largest specimen container in a grouping (perhaps a striking architectural foliage form like the explosive Cordyline "Red Star") in the background so

as to not block smaller containers and plants in front. Fill the medium-sized container or containers with a medium-sized, blooming sub-shrub or herbaceous perennial, such as the reddish-pink spider-gang blossoms of the wooly Grevillea. Plant smaller containers with perennial or annual color like floral heads of yarrow.

For the chef-gardener, create edible combinations using Sweet Bay, pineapple guava, or dwarf citrus as the large specimen. The medium containers could hold upright rosemary, tomatoes, or peppers, and the smaller containers can be used for all your seasonal smaller vegetables like spinach, butter lettuce, carrots, broccoli, and herbs.

Maintain a two-inch lip between the soil line and the top of the container to allow room for fun, personal touches in your container designs ... which is what gardening is all about. Blanket the soil with colorful and decorative smooth pebbles, vibrant Scotch or Irish mosses, baby's tears, or elfin thyme. Artistic pieces such as small animal sculptures, tiny rain gauges, or a miniature laughing Buddha also enhance the look of potted plants and add focal points to your design.

Let your creativity flourish in the boundless possibilities of container gardening.

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TODD DAVIDSON OWNS
SAGE ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES

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TIPS:

Choose a **container size** large enough for your specific plant or plants. Smaller pots tend to dry out faster than larger pots, which have a greater amount of soil to retain moisture. Large specimen plants in massive containers can be quite striking but do require some muscle or machinery to place. Use containers between 15 and 120 quarts capacity and avoid containers with narrow openings.

Use a **"soiless" substrate mix** purchased from retail nurseries or a commercial landscape soils producer. Substrate should be weed and pathogen-free as well as lightweight.

Ensure that the bottom of the containers have **drain holes** for excess water to leak out. In some cases, you may need to raise the

containers slightly with pre-fabricated brick or stone "pot feet" to provide adequate drainage.

Fertilize with a slow-release product worked into the substrate or mix fertilizer with water and feed with a light concentration frequently. Be sure to follow the directions carefully so as not to "burn" the plants from excessive soluble salts. A "complete fertilizer" providing both macro and minor nutrients will yield best growth results.

Consider **automatic micro-irrigation** equipped with an automatic control clock to aid with regular moisture allocation.

Read up on your plants to fulfill **sunlight or shade requirements**.