

Container Gardening

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Published in *Estes Park News*, July 27, 2018, page 13.

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As Americans downsize in home and yard, or simply beautify their living area, there is no need to end your gardening practices. In fact, this might be an excellent time to use your creative abilities to utilize space you never thought you'd ever use. Container gardening is an excellent way to help beautify and can provide a healthful activity and diet. Even people with less than a favorable growing site can take advantage of container gardening.

Garden Environment/Location:

If you don't have the luxury of a large planting area, that's alright. You can still garden, in a smaller and more contained area. Regardless of small or large, use the same elements of sun/shade and wind exposure to determine the kinds of containers and plants to include. Keep those items in mind as you create your space.

Soil Selection:

Sometimes, you can control the soil you use. But sometimes you can't. Mountainous areas (such as along the Front Range) consist of immature or not-fully developed soils. Rocky or very sandy soil particles, neither of which provide plants with nutrients or water necessary to successfully maintain them. Soils that develop from this rocky parent material are often not conducive to the plant growth. Potting soil or soil-less mixes (from nurseries or grocery/hardware stores) often provide a more suitable environment for plants to anchor roots and access water and nutrients.

Container Composition:

The containers should also be a consideration when designing your garden. Porous materials such as ordinary clay pots (terra-cotta) can be inexpensive, but depending on your environment, can transpire or lose water quickly. These same containers (glazed on the outside), are a bit more expensive but are far better at maintaining/preventing water loss. Size of your containers also greatly determines the frequency of watering your plants. Another consideration is the weight, being mindful of moving or transporting. Larger and heavier containers may be better suited for a single-permanent location, whereas smaller or less heavy materials can be moved more easily. Be cognizant of cost, environmental factors, type and size of container.

Plant Selection:

Finally, the best part of this entire exercise is selecting the right plant for the right location. Many people select flowering plants (annual) for color and ease of care. Others may rather

grow herbs or vegetables. Regardless of the planting composition of your garden, consider some of the basic elements presented here, and let your creativity flow!

A helpful tip to consider when first planting is to remove all flowers and fruit. While this may be difficult to do, it helps the plant put energy into growing roots and will aid in plant establishment.

If you want to grow vegetables, you can find container-sized plants for nearly all your favorites, such as tomatoes, peppers, summer squash, lettuce and even sweet corn! When you're seed shopping look for plant descriptions that include the words: patio, pixie and dwarf.

For more information on container gardening, consider using the following resources on gardening at: <http://extension.colostate.edu/garden>

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