

Limited Space? Try Container Gardens

If you enjoy gardening but live in a limited area where there is not a lot of room for a garden, try container gardening.

Living in an apartment or condominium is no excuse for not gardening, since many kinds of vegetables can be grown in containers with little effort, says Larry Bass, agricultural extension horticulture specialist at N.C. State University.

Container gardening is simple if you follow a few basic rules.

First, you must choose the proper container, use a good soil mix, and follow the proper planting and spacing requirements. Also, you should provide adequate water and fertilizer for your plants and place the containers where they will receive at least five hours of full sun each day.

Containers come in many different sizes, shapes and materials, Bass said. All containers—whether clay, wood, plastic or ceramic—should have an adequate number of holes in the bottom for proper drainage. If the containers do not provide fast drainage, punch additional holes in the bottom. Setting the containers on a solid surface, like a cement or tile patio, will reduce the drainage. To remedy this problem, raise the containers one to two inches off the floor by setting

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them on short pieces of wood.

The vegetables you grow will determine the size of your containers, Bass explained. As a rule, most vegetables that can be grown in the ground can be grown in containers as long as ample space is provided for root development.

Shallow-rooted crops like lettuce, peppers, radishes and herbs will grow best in a container that is at least six inches in diameter with an eight-inch soil depth, Bass said. Tomatoes, squash, pole beans and cucumbers will grow well in bushel baskets, half barrels and wooden tubs.

The ideal planting medium for containers provides fast draining and sufficient water retention to keep the root zone evenly moist, the specialist said, adding that a "soil-less" potting mix works best. In addition to draining fast, soil-less mixes are lightweight and free from soil-borne diseases and weed seeds,

Bass explained. The mixes can be purchased from garden centers.

The planting and spacing requirements can be found on the seed packet or plant tag. When using containers, it is important to limit the number of plants based on the container size and the eventual size of the plant at maturity. Bass recommended planting more seeds than needed in each container because there is seldom 100 percent germination.

After the seeds have sprouted and the foliage of the seedlings is touching, thin the plants to the desired number.

Concerning fertilization, Bass recommended following a regular fertilization program using a complete fertilizer since soil-less mixes contain few nutrients.

Watering is one of the most important jobs a container gardener will perform, Bass said. Some vegetables may need watering every day, depending on the container size and weather conditions. The best way to water is by hand, using a watering can or a garden hose sprayer attachment.

If the hose sits in the sun, be sure the water has run long enough to cool before applying it to the vegetables. Hot water does not stimulate root development.

10 Most Frequently Asked Questions—And The Answers

When the telephone rings at the Brunswick County Agricultural Extension office, Master Gardener volunteers and extension agents deal with an incredible array of one-of-a-kind questions relating to lawn and garden care.

But some questions are asked so frequently they qualify for the "Top Ten". Here are the questions—and their answers, courtesy of Extension Agent David Nash and the Master Gardener program at the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension office at Bolivia.

Q: How much lime and fertilizer do I need to add to my lawn or garden?

A: The only way to tell for sure is to take a soil sample. Soils in Brunswick County vary greatly in the amount of lime or fertilizer needed. Also, different plants have different requirements for nutrients and for pH.

Q: How do I take a soil test?

A: Soil tests are provided as a free service to residents of North Carolina. Soil sample boxes and information sheets are available from the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Office, at many lawn and garden stores, and from branches of the Brunswick County Public Library.

Q: How do I control moles in my lawn?

A: Moles inhabit lawns when there is an adequate food supply such as grubs and other soil organisms. By eliminating their food supply, moles will usually move on to another location in search of food. Several pesticides are available for grub control. Contact the extension office for specific pesticide recommendations. It is against the law in North Carolina to use poison bait for mole control. Spear-type traps may be used if a permit is obtained from the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

Q: When is the best time to prune crepe myrtles in the landscape?

A: If severe pruning is needed, crepe myrtles should be pruned in the winter when dormant. Pruning of faded flowers or seed pods during the growing season will result in new flushes of flowers and increase the length of the blooming period.

Q: What type and when do I use pesticides on my lawn?

A: Pesticides should only be used after the pest problem in your lawn has been properly identified. Sometimes there are other control measures available without using pesticides. These include proper plant selection, cultural controls, etc. If pesticides are required, one should read the label before purchasing and applying the product.

Q: When is the proper time to fertilize my lawn?

A: Several different types of turf grass are used for home lawns in Brunswick County. Most require some fertilizer on an annual basis. The type of grass in your lawn combined with soil test results will determine the type and amount of fertilizer needed. Lawn maintenance calendars are available at the extension office.

Q: How do I control fleas and ticks in my lawn?

A: Fleas and ticks can be controlled by applying an insecticide containing Dursban. Make sure that the product you purchase is labeled for home landscape use and follow all label directions.

Q: When is the best time to prune azaleas?

A: Azaleas should be pruned after blooming. This would also be a very good time to fertilize them.

Q: My azaleas have tiny black spots on the bottom of the leaves and the tops of the leaves appear yellowish white. What is causing this problem?

A: These injury symptoms are normally caused by the Azalea Lace Bug. This insect can be controlled with Orthene insecticide. Read and follow all label directions.

Q: How often should I water my lawn and garden?

A: Most lawns and gardens need one inch of water per week during the growing season. When adequate rainfall has not occurred, irrigation water should be applied during the early morning hours. In sandy soil irrigation may be required every two to three days to supply one inch of water weekly.

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