

CONTAINER GARDENS

By Bodie V. Pennisi
Extension Floriculture Specialist
Department of Horticulture, University of Georgia

Script for presentation

Slide 1

You can enjoy a variety of flowers, even though your free time and growing space is limited. Just plant a container garden! The variety of colors shapes and textures that these small treasures offer makes them garden favorites. With increased urbanization, container gardens come to the rescue to brighten up patios and balconies.

In this presentation you will learn what container gardens are and how to select, plant, and care for them.

Slide 2

Let us get familiar with a few terms commonly used by retailers. Container garden is just that – a garden, contained in certain amount of space. It includes... *Read slide.* The color bowl and combination basket are both examples of container gardens

Slide 3

Container gardens can vary from 10"-wide bowls, to over 3-feet wide pots. The principles of a regular garden apply in terms of design and seasonal change. Certain qualities make these gardens attractive, for example in larger pots you can display a wide array of interesting plant material while applying artistic techniques. And just like a regular garden, your container garden is not static, but is ever changing with the growing season.

Slide 4

Container gardens are versatile. This concept can be applied to hanging baskets, maybe more appropriately termed "hanging gardens". Containers can be placed on the windowsill, by the backdoor, on the balcony or patio and around the garden. Containers can also be mounted on castors and arranged in different groups and even protected inside during the cold months. You can re-create almost any type of environment and select plants for it—from sun, shade, aquatic, to desert. You can choose containers from a great variety of colors, textures, forms and sizes.

Slide 5

For best results, select plants for optimal performance depending on the seasons, cool-loving plants for Spring and Fall gardens, and heat-loving plants for Summer gardens. For example, most Marguerite daisies, Lobelias, Twinspurs, and Nemesisias, look great in the Spring but decline in Georgia summers.

Slide 6

Because you are working within a limited amount of space (think of it as canvas for a painting), for best results you should try to adhere to some basic design principles. These are... *Read slide.* You will see examples of each in the next few slides.

Slide 7

The first design principle is focus. You need to draw the eye toward the center of the garden and let the other plants complement and 'flow' around this center. In the example here, the lime-green variegated foliage of the sage does this.

Slide 8

The second design principle is balance. This can be accomplished using symmetrical or asymmetrical design. In the bowl on the left, you can see that there's equal amount of plant material on all sides, creating a symmetrical design. In the container on the right, the vertical begonia pulls the eye to the top right, while the trailing ivy draws the eye to the bottom left creating an asymmetrical effect. In either case balanced design is achieved.

Slide 9

A third design principle is form. Each plant in the design has a growth habit, or form. Some plants have a strong upright habit. Others have a sprawling habit, while a third type grows as a mound. Each of these habits can contribute to the overall aesthetic quality of the container garden if used in the right place.

Slide 10

A fourth design principle is texture. Various plants have different textured foliage. Some have linear leaves, like grasses, dracaena spike, or cordyline (red arrows). Others have rounded leaves, like the ornamental potato and geranium (blue arrows). Coleus and Persicaria have oval, elongated leaves (green arrows). A good design will use a variety of textures to make 'a feast for the eye' !

Slide 11

A fifth design principle is rhythm. Rhythm is achieved by planting same or similar-looking plants at repeated intervals (red arrows). When the eye travels around the container, the viewer gets a sense of a rhythmic movement.

Slide 12

A sixth design principle is proportion. To keep plants and container in proportion and achieve a balanced appearance, the height of the plants should not exceed more than 2/3 the height of the container. For shallow or small containers, choose plants that will not get too large and/or choose plants with small-sized foliage. For large or tall containers, choose plants with medium to high mature size and/or plants with large leaves.

Slide 13

You have seen a basic color wheel but are you familiar with a flower color wheel? The names most accurately describe the profusion of colors seen in flowers. The three primary colors are yellow, red and blue, (seen here on the inner circle of the diagram). The secondary colors green, orange, and violet are achieved by a blend of the two primary colors that surround them. For example, green is achieved by mixing yellow and blue. When green and yellow are combined, a yellow-green color results. As the intensity of a color decreases or increases, a new color appears, for example Midnight blue. Florists use names from the color wheel to best describe the color of various flowers.

Slide 14

Color theory is very important in the design. The first term to get familiar with is color echoing. It simply means that a color from one plant's flower or leaf is identical or similar to another plant's flower or leaf. In the example on the left, the white flower of the Vinca is 'echoed' with the white variegated geranium leaf (red arrows). In the example on the right, the burgundy coleus foliage is 'echoed' with the dark-burgundy center of the Persicaria leaf (blue arrows).

Slide 15

Color harmony means grouping colors depending on what effect or use is desired. Using the various effects, you can achieve various moods. In monochromatic color harmony only one color is used, but its lightness or darkness or strength may vary, with an overall soothing effect. In the design on the left, plants with variation of blue / purple flower or foliage are used (with the exception of the white geranium flower). In the design on the right, silver/white foliage is mostly used creating similar soothing effect.

Slide 16

Analogous color harmony is one in which we use colors that are closely related to one another (next to each other on the color wheel). This creates more drama than the monochromatic color harmony. In this example, we use yellow, orange and red, which are closely related on the color wheel.

Slide 17

Complementary color harmony uses colors that are opposite one another on the color wheel. This dramatic color harmony demands attention. Usually such designs use highly-contrasting colors such as red, yellow, and blue.

Slide 18

Neutral color harmony uses black, gray, or white to add depth to the composition, to make other colors look brighter and deeper, or to divide colors that clash or are too strong.

Slide 19

Polychromatic color harmony is a mixture of many colors. Its effect is closest to a native setting because flowers naturally blend together.

Slide 20

Here are some tips for making great-looking container gardens.

Slide 21

Mix plants with at least three textures of foliage to make a container garden interesting. In the photo on the left; Coleus, Dracaena spike and Moses-in-the-boat make a successful combination (red arrows). In the photo on the right; Sweet potato vine 'Marguerite', Moses-in-the-boat and Dragon Wing Begonia achieve a visually pleasing display (blue arrows).

Slide 22

Use plenty of plants that are foliage plants, with no flowers, because foliage color, leaf shape, and texture are just as important as the flowers. In the photo on the left, we use Red Dracaena, Alocasia, and Asparagus fern (red arrows). In the right photo, the foliage plants are English ivy, Phormium grass and Asparagus fern (blue arrows).

Slide 23

Some good foliage contrasts include: downy with glossy (red arrows); small with large (blue arrows); and yellow, or lime-green with violet (pink arrows).

Slide 24

Coleus cultivars are available in a great variety of foliage colors, shapes and sizes. They can also help 'echo' the color of flowers in the container.

Slide 25

Vary the shape of the flowers in the container to add interest, for example petunia vs. verbenas. Also use bicolor flowers.

Slide 26

Vegetative annuals mix well with other annuals, perennials, tropicals, and bulbs. Everything and anything goes as long as it pleases your eye!

Slide 27

To use any plant in the right place for maximum effect, you need to be familiar with the various plant positions in the container garden.

Center plants provide compact, upright growth to fill in the crown of the container. Filler plants typically have compact, upright growth and round out the top of the container.

Corner plants grow well over the container's edge and benefit from a corner position where they have maximum elbowroom. Edge plants drape over the side, softening the look of the container and filling out the space between its corners.

Slide 28

Examples of Center Plants are Salvia, grasses, Dracaena spike, Coleus, Persian shield, Alocasia, Colocasia, and some perennials

Slide 29

Examples of Filler plants are Argyranthemum, Geraniums, Coleus, Iresine, Cuphea, Bracteantha, Dusty Miller, and Heliotrope

Slide 30

Examples of Corner plants are Petunia, Million Bells, Torenia, Scaevola, Plectranthus, Helichrysum, Fuchsia, Ivy Geranium, and Angel Wing Begonia.

Slide 31

Examples of Edge plants are ivy, Ipomoea, Bacopa, Verbena, Vinca vine, Portulaca, Ivy geranium, Plectranthus, and Sweet Potato vine.

Slide 32

Here are a couple of examples of container gardens for sun. We also listed the plants that were used.

Slide 33

Here are a couple of examples of container gardens for shade. You can see examples of how these plants can be used.

Slide 34

You can choose to create theme gardens, such as a fern garden, or a succulent garden.

Slide 35

Now we will look closely at the how-to's of container gardens.

Slide 36

Because of the great variety of options, choosing containers can be challenging but enjoyable! The price range can be quite dramatic; especially for large, terracotta glazed containers. Many people choose plastic containers. These can be just as attractive as heavy clay pots and not as liable to breakage.

Going vertical has never been so easy as well. You can select moss or coco fiber baskets or plastic baskets. Both work equally well as far as plant performance is concerned.

Slide 37

The style and shape of the container should complement the plants grown. The style and shape also should complement other containers for best display. The size of the container will limit the size of the plant. A wide range of materials is available -- plastics, fiberglass, terracotta, stone, and wood.

Slide 38

With used containers, make sure that they are clean. Wash out any old compost, chemical or paint residues. To help prolong the life of wooden containers, line them with plastic. The type of plants will determine the growing conditions you will need to create. Unless you are creating a bog garden, the container must have drainage holes. If not, the compost will become saturated and stagnant, killing the plants. A 3- to 5-gallon container should have at least four drainage holes. Containers made of molded foam usually do not come with pre-drilled holes, so you must add them. There's always a reminder from the manufacturer so you will not forget. Do not use gravel in the bottom of the pot! It impedes drainage and adds weight!

Slide 39

Here're a few things to keep in mind when selecting baskets.

Moss lining looks natural and allows easy planting through the base and sides of the basket. You can use a black plastic (polyethelene) liner inside the moss liner with holes pierced through to helps hold moisture while retaining a 'natural' effect. Coconut-fiber matting liners are a woolly-textured, natural-looking fiber, which lasts several seasons. Biodegradeable liners are made from compressed fibers, and will last for 2 years or more. Holes need to be made in sides and base for trailing plants. Plastic when used alone with holes pierced in it is an effective container but it only looks good if plants grow over to camouflage the container.

Slide 40

Soils for containers need to have three key elements. They need to be well-drained and to provide good aeration, while retaining enough water to maintain good plant growth. If you use moss, coco fiber baskets or any container that allows high evaporation, and use plants that need a lot of water, consider adding a water-retaining agent to the soil mix.

Slide 41

Mix a moisture-retaining agent in the medium (follow manufacturer's recommendation for mixing rates) or purchase soilless medium with moisture retaining agent mixed in.

Slide 42

When choosing a location for your container garden, avoid exposed windy sites. Plants in windy locations use a large amount of water in order to survive. Windy, hot, conditions may require watering every few hours, especially if the plants are large, and/or the container is small. For locations that receive 4 - 12 hrs of sun a day, select full sun to partial shade plants. For locations that receive 2 - 4 hrs of sun daily, select plants for partial or full shade.

Slide 43

When choosing plant material, keep the following tips in mind; a) use plants that perform strongly in the center of the container; b) Torenias and Bacopas have flexible stems and therefore are good for the edges of the planter; c) for large leaf display and excellent performance nothing beats Ipomea or sweet potato vine; d) Verbena and Petunia are a must for sun container gardens.

Slide 44

The basic rule for a successful container garden is that all plants combined in one container should have similar water, light and fertilizer requirements.

Slide 45

Because hanging baskets are viewed at eye level, or from below, plants with strong upright habit are not well-suited. For such containers, best choices are plants with mounding habit for the center and plants with trailing habit for the edge. Use 2-3 different types of trailing/mounding plants in the same hanging basket. Also use odd numbers of plants per container.

Slide 46

Here's an example of planting a hanging combo basket. Three plants were used, Bacopa, Torenia, and Veronica 'Georgia Blue'. The color of the letters corresponds to the flower color.

Slide 47

For this large whiskey barrel, we used Vinca, Pentas, Angelonia, Asparagus fern, Sun Coleus, and Verbena.

Slide 48

The Angelonia and the Sun Coleus, with their tall, upright habit were planted in the center of the container. The trailing plants Verbena, and Veronica 'Georgia Blue' found their place around the edge.

Slide 49

This is the finished container garden.

Slide 50

When planting herb gardens, apply the same rules in terms of plant habit as with the flowering plants.

Slide 51

When you are done with the planting, water thoroughly, step back and enjoy!

Slide 52

Container gardens need some maintenance over the growing season.

Slide 53

Baskets need more attention to watering than other containers because of the air movement around them. More water is required to replace evaporative losses.

Clay containers dry out faster than those made of other materials. Use a water-retaining agent. Upright watering cans with short spouts can be heavy and awkward to lift and tilt when watering hanging baskets. Use a hose with an adjustable spray nozzle. If your basket is fixed to a pulley system, it can be lowered and immersed in a bowl to water it.

Slide 54

Regular fertilization can be done with a slow-release fertilizer and/or liquid form. It is recommended that you either apply slow-release fertilizer at planting, or use a soilless mix with slow-release fertilizer already in it. This will ensure good initial plant growth. Follow label directions when applying fertilizers. Do not use granular fertilizer or weed-and-feed formulations in containers because you may damage the plants.

Slide 55

Nothing lasts forever! Container gardens need to be gardened. Plants need trimming, deadheading, spraying for pests and diseases, weed control, which should be manually by hand, and occasionally - replacement.

Slide 56

Here's a series of pictures from the 'life of a container garden'!

Slide 57

Expert at gardening or not, try planting a container garden. You will be rewarded!

Slide 58

Credit slide