

Container Gardening

Container Gardening 101

By Sally Thompson, Container Gardening Chair WACONIAH August 2006

I thought it might be the time to review gardening in containers, 101. The orchid workshop by James Hoffman inspired me to check my own growing conditions. Proper light was the first step. With orchids, a dark green leaf meant that it needs more light. Temperature was the next step. Orchids like a 10 degree drop at night, and I find that many of my own plants do better with that temperature separation. Of course, this is mostly for house plants. Air circulation or air movement of some kind. Use a fan or open window, not directly on plants, but close by. Humidity is vital to plants in containers. Orchids prefer 40% to 70% for best growth. This is where pebbles in the tray work well, keeping water in the tray. He also suggested using carpet padding, instead of pebbles in the tray.

Nutrition or feeding is next. Fertilize weakly weekly for orchids and for many other types of plants. Remember to leach out the pots with heavy amounts of water about every three months. This brings us next to watering. If in doubt, don't. More plants are killed by over-watering than anything else. I realize that all of the above tips are old hat to most garden club members, but it is important to revisit some basics, or container gardening 101.

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Are your containers humdrum? Do you strive for something new? Do you want to go from bor-i-n-g to dramatic? I can't promise you a rose garden, but here are some hints you may use. Use containers with a colorful glaze and group them together. In another area use a different color entirely and match the plants with them. These containers should be large enough for them to go longer between watering. Consider architectural plants. The ones that have dramatic impact. Tropical plants such as bromeliads, cycads and large succulents will fill the bill. These also make excellent strong focal points in the garden.

Hunt for pedestals, stands and other finds at garage and yard sales to make your container collections stand 'out and up' from the ordinary. These can be placed anywhere to create a pattern or to break up a plain wall area. Dive right in and play around with containers until you find just the right combination for you and your garden and it won't be bor-i-n-g anymore.

Fragrance in Containers

By Sally Thompson, Container Gardening Chair WACONIAH August 2008

As a gardener matches colors and shapes for planting in a container, have you considered planting for fragrance? Fragrance will not only lure people into the garden, but will also lure some needed bees and butterflies. Sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*) is not only a good filler, but the light honey like fragrance is pleasant to both humans and insects. Some cultivars of *Nicotiana* and *Primula* are also lightly scented. These would add color and fragrance to any potted rose bush or rose tree.

If larger plants are desired, *Acacia dealbata* is an excellent tree for containers. It has a subtle winter scent and will last many years as a focal point in new or established gardens. A pair of these would also add interest to frame a doorway or garden entrance. Seasonal color can be added to the containers as well to vary the look. Some of the most favorite plants for fragrant containers will certainly be herbs. Nothing is so perfect year round as a collection of lavender, rosemary, thyme, or 'you name' it herbs.

Scents are pleasant and useful to bees; colors have a wide range; and they need very little water and care. Select containers with some consideration for ease of watering and fertilizing needs, moveability and you will enjoy this part of your garden for many years.

Trees & Shrubs in Containers

By Sally Thompson, Container Gardening Chairman WACONIAH August 2009

Many new trees and shrubs are developed that are just perfect for planting in containers. Move them around the garden on rollers to enjoy their best view, light and ease of watering. *Acer p. dissectum* Orangeola will reward you with a 2 to 5 foot spread of cascading laceleafs. Loves full sun and is a beauty. Another tree that grows more shrub-like is *Magnolia Grandiflora Alta*. It also loves full sun, but I've been warned it may grow to 15 feet at maturity. You may need to transplant it before then.

An easy and hardy shrub is *Pittosporum tenuifolium* Golf Ball. Yes, it's rounded like a golf ball with height and spread both at 2 feet. As an extra bonus it produces small chocolate purple flowers. Yummy! Live in a high wind area? Look for *Abelia grandiflora* Kaleidescope. It not only takes high winds, but also harsh weather. Grows very large and will need to be removed from container and planted in larger area. The bonus is the white jasmine looking flowers grow on red stems. A stunner.

Some new perennials that may be added to the containers either separately or with the shrubs are Lantana Chapel Hill. It's a butterfly magnet with yellow flowers and loves full sun. Looking for fragrance? Try *Echinacea* Raspberry Tart. Have you had enough Heucheras? If not, one more to look for is *Heuchera* Electra, a chartreuse colored beauty. It will contrast very well with so