

Many of us would love to have a flower garden and raise some home-grown vegetables, but space can be a limiting factor. Container gardening can be the answer for those of us who have just a little space on a deck or patio, in the landscaping around the house, or along the edge of a walk. This form of gardening is fun, and the increasing popularity is reflected in the wonderful selection of containers available in garden stores.

The most enjoyable part of container gardening may even come from the containers themselves. I have spent hours at garage sales, flea markets, and second hand shops in search of the most interesting containers for my flowers, herbs and vegetables. The container may even be the actual ornamental element in the setting.

Consider what you may find in an antique shop. Look for old wheelbarrows, milk jugs, metal buckets, water troughs and nail kegs. Once you start thinking about how much soil something will hold, your imagination may really kick in. You'll start thinking about lining that wire egg basket or wooden shipping crate with plastic. Perhaps you could fill that old sink or tub with soil to raise a crop of tomatoes. But remember to drill drainage holes or put slits in plastic liners to drain excess water.

Don't forget the good old variety of pots that are actually intended for plants. Glazed pottery comes in wonderful colors to compliment any home setting. If you opt for terracotta pots, you will need to water more often because water will evaporate quickly from the porous clay material.

Commercial bagged potting soil is a quick and easy way to fill your containers. Different materials mixed together also work well. Mix media such as sand, perlite, vermiculite, pine bark, compost or peat to create your very own signature blend of potting medium. Different blends can also be found in the UF/IFAS publication <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/VH032> Your medium should drain excess moisture well, but not dry out quickly like sand.

There are several options for fertilizing your plants, but you should use complete fertilizers with added micronutrients. Slow release fertilizers release nutrients over a longer period of time so they are always available to the plants.

Now choose your plants and set your pots where they will get at least six hours of sunlight each day. For more instruction on how to design your containers, attend one of our UF workshops "Container Gardening" at the Fort White Public Library, 5:45 on May 16th, and at the Main Library in Lake City at 1:30 on Saturday, May 18th. Free and everyone is welcome to attend. (Published 5-12-13)