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PLANTING IN CONTAINERS

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Do you love lots of colorful bloom and foliage, but only have a small plot for gardening? If that is the case, container gardening is the answer. So many different and colorful plants can be used, which can easily be changed out for the different seasons. However, first things first – what is put into the container for a growing medium will determine the success of your plantings.

Plants like good drainage, especially those in containers. If water pools around the roots too long, root rot will damage and possibly even kill the plant. For years, gardeners have been covering the bottom of containers with gravel, pieces of broken pottery, styrofoam packing material and the like. Do not do this . . . nothing but a good potting mix should be put into a plant container and here is why.

Instead of water draining immediately through the soil, then into gravel or other material that may have been put into the bottom of a container, the water will completely saturate the soil above any other material in a container before moving on down; therefore, no air spaces will be left in the soil. This process could take a long time and in the interim, plant roots will be starved for oxygen. Here is a good example of how water drains through different materials:

Lay a rectangular-shaped sponge flat and saturate it with water. Time how long it takes for the excess water to drain out. Now, turn the sponge 90 degrees so it is upright with the long side of the sponge perpendicular to the floor, and again saturate it with water. Drainage will occur more quickly because the shape of a container has a lot to do with how much water it holds. A shallow plant container (like the sponge placed flat) filled with soil will hold more water longer than a tall, narrow one (like the sponge turned upright). When gravel or other material is added to the bottom, it effectively makes that container shallower; water will sit in the top material too long before draining through, and the plant roots will be oxygen-deprived. So, fill those plant containers all the way with potting mix (not garden soil . . . it is too heavy for containers) and do not use gravel or any other material at the bottom. Healthier plants will be the result.

Learn more about container gardening this Saturday, May 18th 2013, at the Master Gardener Hanging Baskets class. Attendees will discover how to keep nibbling deer and pesky gophers away from blooms by taking advantage of unused eaves or front porch space. Demonstrations will show what type of containers to use, and the best soil and plants. This class is free to the public, and will be from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Government Center Hearing Room - Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court, Placerville.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.