

# Top Ten Tips for: Container Planting

Pots, containers and hanging baskets are a great way to add colour and interest to many areas of your garden, particularly those that need a seasonal boost, and those places where it is impossible to plant in the open ground. The versatility of container gardening gives you the opportunity to let your imagination run wild – these are our top ten tips to help you:

1. The combination of plants and container is an art form. If you get it right the result will be so much more than just another planted container, it will be a real garden feature. Try choosing your plants and pots together, experiment with combinations of shape and colour and the results will be rewarding.
2. When choosing pots and containers choose large ones. These are more efficient at holding water and do not dry out as quickly. They are also more stable and less likely to blow over. Group pots together on the patio, this helps to shade the walls of the containers, keep them cool and prevent drying out.
3. When choosing a container for permanent planting think about repotting: choose a traditional flowerpot shape with a wide neck. A root bound plant growing in a pot with a narrow neck is almost impossible to extract. You will end up sacrificing the pot or the plant.
4. Never use garden soil in pots containers or hanging baskets. Garden soil contains weed seeds, bacteria, fungal spores, micro-organisms, worms and insects that may be quite harmless in the open ground but that can be very damaging when confined in the small volume of soil in a pot.
5. Use loam-based compost such as John Innes in pots and containers. It holds water and nutrients more efficiently and plants are less liable to wilt. Alternatively use Westland container and hanging basket compost: this has been specially formulated to retain moisture and give excellent results, particularly with seasonal bedding plants.
6. Water retaining gel is an excellent addition to compost used for annual summer bedding plants however it is not advisable to use it when potting permanent subjects. The gel will hold on to water during cold winter weather; this is even more damaging if the pot freezes.
7. Use a controlled release fertilizer, such as Westland Feed-All plant food, either as granules or as plugs to feed plants in containers. Controlled release fertilizers only release nutrients into the compost when it is moist enough and the temperature is high enough for plant growth. One application will last for several weeks.
8. Using a decorative mulch of gravel or stone chippings on the compost surface not only looks decorative but it also helps to conserve moisture and suppress weeds. It also keeps the compost in place if watering is over enthusiastic.
9. Use a generous layer of broken crocks or large stones in the bottom of any pot to promote good drainage. This is particularly important when planting shrubs or perennial plants in containers.
10. Use pot feet or pieces of tile under pots standing on paving. This keeps the drainage holes in the bottom of the pots open and prevents waterlogging.