# Creative Containers

Prepared by Sharon Yiesla of
Sharon Yiesla, Horticultural Services Prepared 5/12

## Container Gardening Basics

- **Containers**
  - Clay pots: -easy to find and relatively inexpensive.
    -heavy when filled.
    -porous; they tend to dry out quickly; may need to water more often.
  - Plastic pots: - available in a wide range of styles and colors.
    -are more light weight.
    -not porous, so plastic containers retain water longer than clay.
  - Mesh baskets with liners:
    -constructed of wire and have a widely spaced mesh.
    -can be lined with sphagnum moss or coconut fiber.
    -extremely susceptible to drying out due to their open design.
  - Concrete and concrete look-alikes:
    -becoming more widely available now.
    -planters made of cement tend to be very durable, but very heavy.
    -newer types of containers look like cement, but made of a foam material. These are quite light and easy to handle.

  Ideally, all containers should have drainage holes.

- **Container "soils"**
  - The "soil" in a container is very **shallow** and this affects drainage. It sets up a perched water table at the bottom of the pot, leading to poor aeration.
  - "Soil" in a container also has a **small volume**. So the soil is a poor reservoir of water and nutrients, leading to frequent watering and fertilizing. This need for frequent watering, coupled with poor drainage at the bottom of the container can lead to poor root growth and poor overall growth of the plant.
  - Are really soil-less mixes made up of coarse particles like vermiculite and perlite. The coarse particles form large pores that allow good aeration, while retaining enough smaller pores to store water. This overcomes the drainage and aeration problems.

- **Watering**
  - Frequency: due to the small volume of soil in a container, there is less of a reservoir and a container will have to be watered much more frequently than an in-ground garden. In some situations, **daily** watering may be needed.
  - Water thoroughly. Apply enough water so that water comes out the drainage hole.
  - Products that absorb water and slowly release it back to the plant are available.

- **Fertilizer**
  - Included in some soil-less mixes
  - Frequent watering leaches out nutrients
  - Nitrogen: green leafy growth
  - Phosphorus: rooting and flowering
  - Potassium: good root growth and overall vigor

- **Plants**
  - Easy to grow plants
    - ✓ Annual flowers, annual herbs and vegetables work very well in containers. They last only one season.
  - More difficult plants
    - ✓ Perennial flowers, perennial herbs, woody plants (trees and shrubs) and many fruits can be used, but these all require a much higher level of maintenance.
    - ✓ The one characteristic that these higher-maintenance plants share is their perennial nature-- they will live on season after season. For these plants, we must be concerned with winter protection

## Designing Containers

- Use them in groups
- They should complement each other in color and style
- They should not clash with their surrounding
- Unique containers are fun, but use in moderation

## Designing with the plants

- They should complement one another
- Plant in groups for effect
- Plan for bloom time
- Combine plants that have the same needs

## Creativity

Place containers in unusual places
Make mini-gardens
Make unusual choices in terms of the plants used
Do something unexpected
Choose colors carefully
Make use of texture as well
Include props occasionally
Over plant in short term planters
Try something completely different (use containers that aren't really containers)
Sometimes simple is best