

Getting Started

Two Types of Container Gardens			
Grow Together		Put Together	
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
	Doubt in final product	Confidence in final product	
	Possible plug death	Better plant survival	
Natural gathered look		Neat, methodical look	
Plants intertwine together		Plants retain individuality	
Ease of planting			Labor of transplanting
Good for large scale growers		Good for grower/retailer	

How to get started with grow-together container gardens

1st Year

Do some experimenting with combinations of colors, species, and new introductions for the season.

2nd Year

Eliminate any combinations that didn't work so well and try some new combinations.

Develop a "Basic" group of combination containers and grow those in large quantity.

Each Year

Keep records so that adjustments as to number of plugs per pot for different species, total number of plugs per pot, etc. can be made.

Add some new crops in with combinations that worked.

Make a few adjustments to your basic line.

Design Principles

There are several design principles to take into consideration when planning your container gardens.

Focus

The point or area where the eye is drawn first. Place the focus below the tallest point to achieve balance. Develop focus by using large, coarse, or bright colored plant material in that area. All plant material should radiate out from the focus.

Balance

A feeling of stability. Symmetrical balance is equal, almost identical elements on each side of a central axis, with the highest point over the center. Asymmetrical balance is when the two sides of the central axis are not mirror images but have the same visual weight.

Form

Vary the form of the plant material you choose; use tall linear species to add height; mounded species to add mass; and low growing, cascading species to fill in, add depth, and soften the edges of the container.

Texture

Add coarse, medium, and fine textured plants together. Three to five species will achieve an assortment of forms and textures. Use variation and gradation of form and texture.

Rhythm

Repeat color at regular intervals around the outside of a round container or along the length of a long rectangular container. Repeat color in several containers to "tie" them together. Graceful lines of plant leaves add flow and rhythm.

Proportion

Use larger and/or more plants in larger containers, and less and/or smaller plants in small containers. Rule of thumb is the height of the tallest plant should not exceed 1X-2X the height of the container excluding pedestals and "air-fairy" sprigs. Best to use odd numbers: one, three, five or seven plants or plugs of each cultivar.

Color Theory

There are several ways to use color to add interest and appeal to your container gardens. Two of these are, using color echoing and different color harmonies.

“Color echoing” is using repetition of a color from one cultivar to another. For example, using a white flower to echo the white in a green and white variegated foliage. Repetition of any design element adds rhythm to the design and leads your customer’s eye around and around the design not letting them take their eyes off of it!

Color Harmonies		
Color Scheme	Definition	Effect / Use
<u>Monochromatic</u>	Lightness or darkness or strength of the color may vary, but only one color is used	Quiet and soothing
<u>Analogous</u>	Colors closely related to one another (next to each other) on the color wheel	More dramatic than monochromatic
<u>Complementary</u>	Colors opposite one another on the color wheel	Demands attention
<u>Neutral</u>	Black, gray, and white	Add depth to the composition; make other colors look brighter and deeper; divide colors that clash or are too strong; tone down complementary color schemes in daylight; and glow in the dark
Polychrome	Mixture of many colors	This works most of the time because flowers naturally blend together

Tips for Making Container Gardens

- Mix plants with at least three textures of foliage to make a container garden interesting.
- Use plenty of plants that are foliage plants (with no flowers) in your designs. In most cases, foliage color, leaf shape, and texture are just as important as the flowers themselves.
- Some good foliage contrasts would include: downy with glossy; dark with gray; small with large; yellow with violet.
- Use colorful foliage (like Coleus) to “echo” the color of flowers in the container.
- Vary the shape of the flowers in the container garden to add interest.
- Bicolor flowers are becoming more available and are great for color echoing.
- Sometimes you just have to do some “snipping and tucking” of faster growing plants when they are mixed in with slower growing ones. Otherwise, you will lose the slower ones and your design gets destroyed.
- Vegetative annuals mix well with other annuals, perennials, tropicals, and bulbs. Everything and anything goes as long as it is pleasing to the eye of your customer.
- Nothing lasts forever! Container gardens need to be gardened. Plants in container gardens need to be trimmed, dead-headed and replaced.

Grow-Together Combinations	
<i>Good to Use</i>	<i>Do Not Work Well</i>
One vigorous foliage plant in the center	Growth retardants
Upright verbenas, double impatiens, geraniums	Rampant growers
Foliage plants for neutral color & texture	Tall plants
Summer bloomers for summer market	Slow growers
Plants with long necks	Creeping and very compact plants
Various textures and forms	Too many fine textures
Analogous color harmonies	Salmon with violet or fuchsia with bright red

Slight succession of bloom for earlier market	Extremes in bloom times
Odd numbers of plants	Only two plants of one species

Hangin**g** Baskets

If not suitable for use alone, almost all of the new vegetative annual species look good when mixed with other species or cultivars. They can be mixed into combination hanging baskets if they are small growing, mounding and/or trailing plants or into container gardens if they are larger growing. Knowing how to mix them and which ones to mix together is the challenge.

Combination baskets offer the advantage of marketing “companion plants”, so-called because they do not have the fullness in form to stand alone in a monoculture basket but when mixed with other plants they are able to grow in harmony. This includes less than “perfect” plants like those having knobby knees (not much foliage on the bottom), long necks (long flower stalks and floppy flowers) or bald heads (flowering is lacking on top).

Mixed baskets are where small and medium sized growers can become specialist and set themselves apart from the mass-market. It’s like the difference between gourmet and fast food. The creme-de-la-creme gourmet mixed baskets are 12-inch containers. *We have found that 12-inch mixed baskets will accommodate 10 to 12 plugs and that they should be planted in the plug stage in order to get lots of variety of color and texture in the basket.* Transplanting plugs into 4-inch pots and then into baskets later limits the variety that you can plant in one hanging basket and is much more labor intensive. One idea is to plant mixed baskets in stages, planting slow growing species early and adding fast growing species later in the spring. Baskets could be grown on benches to allow better control of watering until the final planting and spacing.

Some growers start with a standard mixed basket and give their employees a recipe to put together a pleasing and sound mixture of plant material. Later, it is easier to customize designs. You can approach the production of combination baskets as a process. The first phase is to do some experimenting with combinations of colors, combinations of species, and try out some new introductions for the season. Like most of us, you will probably have more failures than successes at first. We tried 20 combinations the first year and had 8 successes. Develop a “Basic 5” group of combination baskets by the second season and grow those in large quantity. Eliminate any combinations that didn’t

work so well and try some new combinations. Maybe add some new crops in with combinations that worked. Each year just a few adjustments to your basic line is enough to have something new and different. From season to season keep records so that you can make adjustments as to number of cuttings per pot for different species, total number of cuttings per pot, etc.

- Learning to use the color wheel is important for putting together mixed baskets.
- Mixing color and textures are the two most important elements of designing a pleasing mixed basket.
- One can use all the same color of flowers as long as the texture of the plants is varied.
- Colored foliage will naturally make a mixed basket more interesting.
- The form of the plant is also important but it's easier to get it right. Just be sure to use mounding plants in the center of the basket and trailing plants on the outside edges.
- Vigorous growing plants work well and will not be overbearing if just one plant is used and placed in the center of the basket.
- Appealing combination baskets can be made with plants that are valued for just their foliage.
- Plants that have flowers on long stalks will stand up above the foliage and make a better impression than more compact bloomers.