

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener
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It's not too early to think about hanging baskets for this summer. If you are the 'do it yourself type' here are some suggestions for creating and caring for them.

Our water resources, or lack of them, may make having hanging baskets a little trickier this year. But it can still be done.

Moss baskets are beautiful, but should be avoided in a drought year as they require extra water.

For a very full and lush 12"x 12" wood basket you can place 12, or possibly more, plants. Here are some drought tolerant plants to consider: The ever popular and sturdy **geranium** is always good for the center plant. Fortunately they come in many colors and give a lot of show for the money. To surround this center plant you can use any combination of the following plants:

basket of gold (P = perennial) – this looks like a yellow Alyssum; **Kenilworth ivy** (P) – very charming trailer with small white or blue flowers; **Diascia** (P) (twin spur) – wonderful prolific bloomer usually small pink flowers; **Gazania** (P) – almost a sunflower look; **Helichrysum** (A = annual) (licorice plant) – wonderful lime green trailer, grown for foliage; **Dusty miller** (P) – silver foliage; **Lantana** (P) – umbel type flowers, somewhat trailing, very old fashioned look; **Marigold** (A) – 'Lemon Gem' or 'Lulu' great in baskets and have a nice fern-like foliage; **Calendula** (A) – nice filler; **Convolvulus** (A) (morning glory) – nice trailing vine with trumpet flowers; **Nepeta** (P) – mint family, good green filler; **Portulaca** (A) – beautiful bright colored flowers on a succulent type vine; **Santivalia** (A) (creeping zinnia) – adds color and fun to a basket; **Scaevola** (P) (fan flower) – prolific blue fan shaped flowers; **Bacopa** (P) – heavy trailer with small white flowers, fills a basket in nicely; **Verbena** (A) – gives a nice old fashioned look to a basket; **Celosia** (A) – unusual and gives an interesting look; **bachelor button** (A) – gets tall but will give an airy look to a basket; **Potato vine** (P) – wonderful addition, grown for the foliage; **Cosmos** (A) – choose a shorter variety for a basket.

To put the basket together use a high quality potting soil. To help keep the soil moist, you can use a polymer product. It comes in various trade names. It is a crystal gel that absorbs many times its weight in water and will release that water as the soil dries out. It is best to hydrate the gel in water before evenly distributing it in the soil, in the basket. A tablespoon in a gallon of water will absorb all of the water. You will also want to use a granulated time release fertilizer. This is an important step because watering the baskets causes the nutrients to be leached out. As you make the hole for the plant, place about one-half teaspoon of the fertilizer at the bottom of the hole for each plant. It won't burn the roots because it is a time release fertilizer.

Happy planting, enjoy your hanging baskets, and send up those positive vibes for moisture!

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Cooperative Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.