

Container Gardening - Part III

by Claudia Steen

This article continues with tips on container gardening:

Pests & diseases – Look for signs of pests or diseases, such as disfigured or discolored foliage or visible insect pests. Take action right away. Handpick insects or blast them off with forceful water from a garden hose. Remove and discard affected plant parts. See <http://pep.wsu.edu/hortsense/> or <http://pep.wsu.edu/pestsense/>, WSU Extension's home gardener fact sheets for managing plant and pest problems with Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Diagnose the problems accurately before taking steps to remedy it. If you can't find the answer on the websites I've provided above, call the Master Gardener Clinic line at 509-574-1604.

Set the stage: Showcase your container gardens by staging them at different levels for greater appeal. Choose a plant stand that will weather the elements outdoors. A stand with multiple shelves and a tiered design enables you to display a variety of containers and even store gardening tools. Make sure elevated containers are stable. Beware of placing large or heavy containers on the highest shelf of a tiered stand, making it top-heavy. A tall or tiered plant stand may need to be anchored to an adjoining wall to stabilize it. Match the accessory to the task. The extra weight of an iron plant stand, or an anchored plant shelf can help keep a pot upright on a windy day.

Summer & Winter Care: Planning a summer vacation? Remember your container gardens and plan to help them survive while you're away for an extended period. While you're at it, think ahead to cold-season protection and safeguard your investment in plants and pots. Plants should fare well for a long weekend if you leave them well watered. Prepare for a longer getaway by grouping plants close together, out of direct sun and wind (under the eaves of the house or garage, for instance). Ask a neighbor or friend to check on your container gardens while you're away and water if necessary.

Remove fading flowers and harvest mature and nearly ripe vegetables and fruits to reduce the drain on plants' resources. Plan way ahead by using self-watering containers, drought-resistant plants, and moisture-holding crystals in your potting mix. Your container gardens will be less dependent on you for water.



Cold-season protection: Where freezing weather threatens plants, protect them and your pots from the ravages of winter. Most containers will be at risk if left outdoors unprotected during winter. Moisture from rain or snow held in a pot can freeze, expand, and crack or break the vessel. Move containers off a deck or other exposed site and set them in a garage, shed, or more sheltered part of the landscape or better yet, pots with vegetables or herbs should be brought in so that they may be harvested throughout the winter. Keep the soil mix slightly damp throughout the winter months.

Portable Pots: Large, bulky pots can be heavy, especially when filled with soil and plants. Use these tips to lighten the load and move pots more easily without injuring yourself (or the plant). Plan for mobility by taking advantage of lightweight and portable containers. Made of polystyrene, resin, or fiberglass, they resemble heavier terra-cotta, stone, or concrete. Choose a



lightweight potting mix, especially when the container's weight poses an issue, such as a larger or permanent planter on a balcony or rooftop. Lightweight pots and tall containers with narrow bottoms need a weighted base to stabilize them and prevent tipping. Lighten a large container by reducing its volume. Fill the bottom third (or less) of it with styrene packing pieces secured in a plastic shopping bag. Placing bricks or large stones in the bottom of a lightweight container will help stabilize it but won't improve its mobility.

If you need to move it! Rolling plant stands and other caddies with casters make moving heavy containers a breeze. Plant caddies also keep excess water from damaging the surface beneath them.

Casters roll easily across a hard surface. Move a pot across ground, gravel, or another soft surface by sliding a tarp or sheet of heavy-duty plastic under the container and dragging it. You can also use the leverage of a two-wheel dolly or hand truck to shift and cart hefty pots. Move container gardens before – not after – watering!

Clean & Tidy: If you have room for it, a potting bench or workspace makes it easier to plant and maintain container gardens. A garden carryall keeps hand tools and other supplies handy and portable. Fall cleanup includes emptying and cleaning containers before storing them. When the gardening season returns in spring, you'll be ready to grow with clean pots. Use a stiff brush to clean pots. A wire brush helps remove mineral deposits and stains, but it can scratch and ruin some pots. A scouring pad made for kitchen or grill cleaning can scrub without scratching. Test any scrubber on the pot's bottom first to see if it scratches. Use a splash of white vinegar on a scrubber on the pot's bottom first to see if it scratches. Use a splash of white vinegar on a scrubber to remove white, crusty mineral deposits on clay or other porous pots. Use a sprinkle of baking soda on a plastic scrubber to scour synthetic pots. Disinfect pots by soaking them for 24 hours in a solution of 9 parts water, 1 part bleach, and a squirt of liquid dish detergent; and then scrub.

Happy container gardening from the Master Gardener Program! And if you have gardening questions feel free to call 509-574-1604 or email gardener@co.yakima.wa.us and ask a Master Gardener.