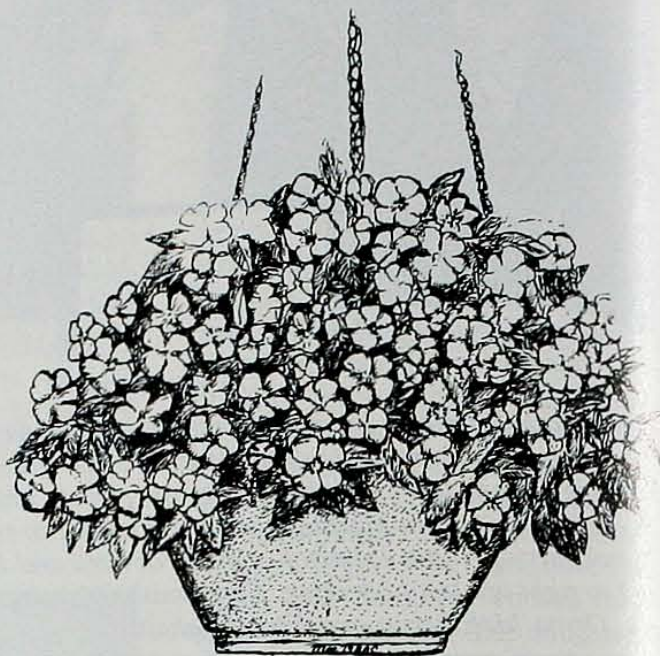


Try this spring

Hanging Basket Gardening



Hanging basket gardens allow you to grow attractive plants in the most unlikely places. A basket or suspended planter can add a vining tomato, cucumber or flowering annual to your porch or balcony without really taking up any space. Hanging baskets display the most colorful blooms at eye level and can disguise a plain or unsightly view.

Numerous types of containers are available for hanging gardens. Any of these, whether plastic, wood or a wire basket lined with peat moss, will work fine. Containers should be lightweight and allow drainage. Baskets hanging outdoors will require watering at least once a day, so check them frequently. Larger containers, such as 10-12" pots, will need less frequent watering than the smaller ones. In addition to watering, fertilize your plants following the manufacturer's instructions. Be sure the baskets are attached securely with strong hooks; a basket plus plants and moist soil can be quite heavy.

Varieties have been developed specifically for hanging baskets and can be found at any garden center. Most bedding plant annuals make attractive, instant baskets. Purchase the plants and design your own baskets, or buy them preplanted. If you decide

to plant your own basket, choose one color, add one type of flower per basket for a bright, showy splash of color or design a mixed planting.

When mixing different plants in one basket, start with more upright plants at the center, such as marigolds, ageratum or coleus; then add trailing plants around the edge of the pot. Some suggestions for vining plants are fuchsia, vinca, alyssum, or black-eyed Susan vine. You might also want to add some variegated foliage such as English ivy. Be sure the plants in combination baskets have similar sun requirements. For example, in a shady location a good combination might include fibrous begonias with English ivy, coleus or impatiens. In a semi-shady to sunny spot, try browallia, alyssum, fuchsia, tuberous begonia, lobelia or pansy. Good sun loving companions include ivy, geraniums, petunias, spider plants, alyssum, dusty miller, lantana, nasturtium, and black-eyed Susan vine. Fibrous begonias can be used in shade, semi-shade or sunny locations.

Place your small purchased plants into a porous planting mix rather than garden soil. Commercial potting soil is sufficiently porous to allow good drainage, whereas garden soil

may be too heavy to drain properly and may contain insects, weeds and disease. Plant the plants as soon as possible after purchasing and keep them well watered and out of direct sunlight for a couple of days. For a spectacular, full basket, plant annuals rather close together allowing a little extra space for continued root growth.

Of course, basket gardening isn't just limited to flowers. Vegetables can be attractive in baskets and provide homegrown food, too. New varieties are being developed especially for basket or container culture. Ask for them at your local bedding plant outlet. Vegetables such as cherry tomatoes, lettuce, radishes and dwarf cucumbers make fine, productive baskets. Herbs like parsley, chives, rosemary and thyme are very attractive in baskets and mix well with flowering annuals.

Don't crowd vegetables in pots. They need plenty of surrounding space so that each plant and its produce can develop properly. Tomatoes, especially, require plenty of space so that the sun can reach the developing fruit.

This spring is a good time to spruce up your home with a few baskets of flowers and vegetables.