



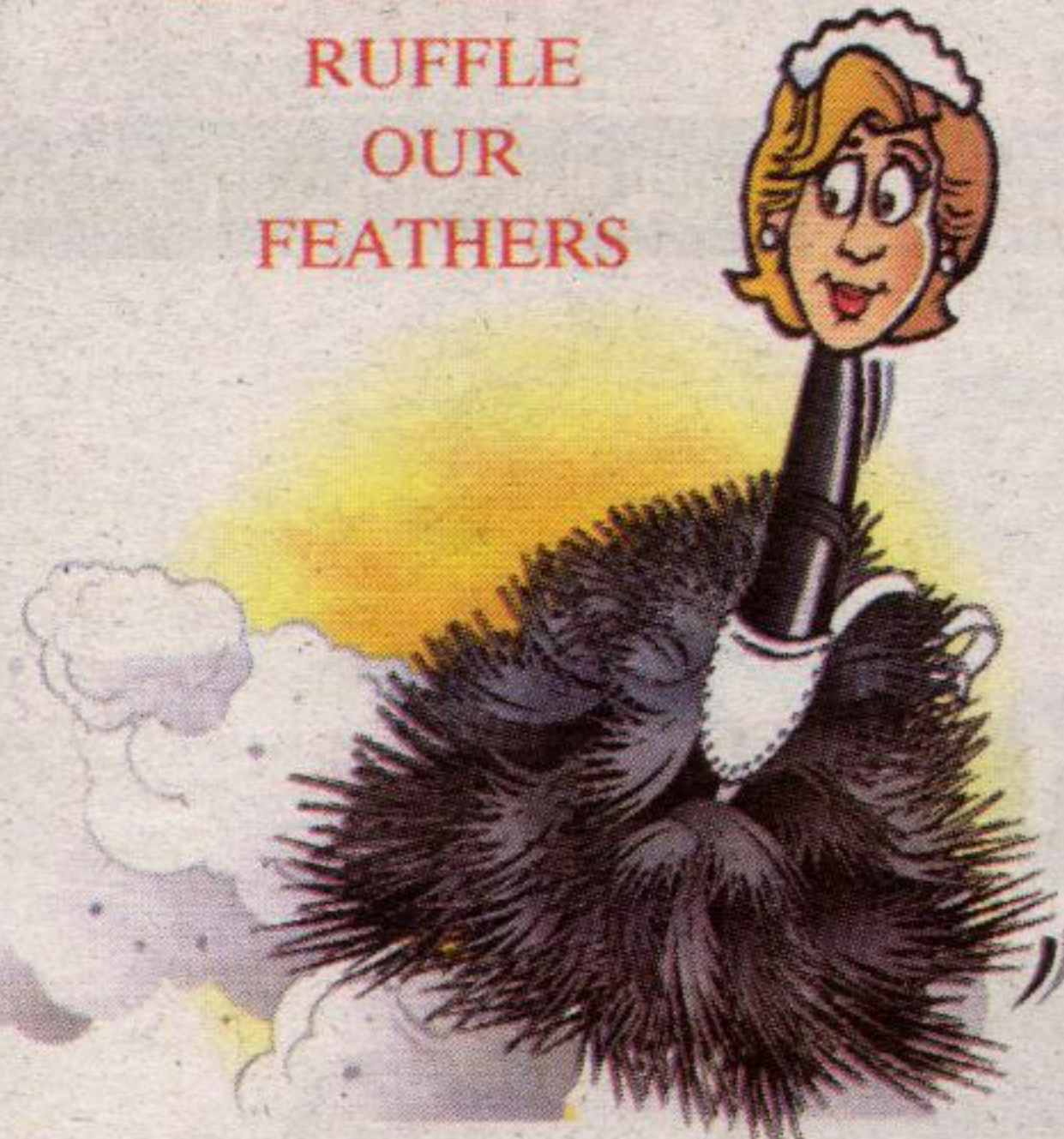

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## Care free container gardening

Container gardens add interest to decks and patios and they're ideal for those who have small spaces—like condo or apartment dwellers.. You can get blooming results worth bragging about with these easy container gardening tips from The Home Depot Canada:

### Soil

One of the biggest complaints container gardeners have is that the soil becomes like concrete and the plants don't thrive. "Roots require air for growth and transpiration, so it is important that some air pockets remain in the soil," says John Mansz, gardening expert for The Home Depot Canada. Avoid using soil from the garden. It compacts too easily. Instead, try a lightweight commercial planting mix. In addition to draining quickly, these mixes are free from disease and weed seeds.

### Watering

Container gardens tend to dry out quickly, so it is important to make sure that the soil stays sufficiently moist to supply the plants' needs. "The addition of a soil supplement called SoilSponge adds up to 7 days between waterings," says Mansz.

### Containers

Anything that holds soil can be used as a container, but what the container is made of has an effect on the success of your planting. "Overheated soil is a common cause of failure in container gardens," says Mansz. Plastic planters, a popular choice, are attractive, lightweight and inexpensive. Opt for light rather than dark colours though. Dark colours absorb heat faster and cause planters to dry out more quickly. Clay

planters are popular too. But, they are porous and require extra watering, particularly in hot summers. They also absorb minerals, especially salt and often produce a crusty build-up on the outside.

"Whichever container you choose, it should be deep enough to support the plants' root systems," says Mansz. "Drainage holes are a must because water logged roots spell death to container plants."

### Container Candidates

Be sure to choose plants suited to their environment. "In shady spots, for example, try ferns such as sprengerii Dwarf hostas, lobelia, coleus, impatiens and fuchsia are good choices too," says Mansz.

In full sun use plants that can take lots of heat. Dwarf zinnias, portulaca and small dwarf snapdragons are good bets. For interest, add trailers like sweet potato vine or trailing verbena.

Don't forget herbs lend themselves to container plantings too. Basil, parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme grow well in pots. Add some trailing nasturtiums to jazz things up.

### Regular Feeding

Frequent watering can quickly lead out essential nutrients. To keep your container garden looking spectacular, you'll need to fertilize regularly. "At planting time use a transplant fertilizer to give the roots a quick boost and help prevent transplant shock," says Mansz. "After that, fertilize every couple of weeks with a water soluble all-purpose solution."

For more gardening tips, visit [www.homedepot.ca](http://www.homedepot.ca)

—News Canada

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