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flowers

Try planting annuals in unusual containers

If there was ever a "marriage made in heaven," it's the annual and the container. Annuals are fast growing and easy to care for, come in abundant colors and shapes, and are inexpensive for container gardening.

There's never a dull season when you have blooming annuals in pots placed along walks, patios and verandas. And though most annuals flower in spring and summer, you can extend their color into early fall by planting them along with perennials and other flowering plants available at garden centers.

Before you decide which annuals you want to grow, shop around for unusual containers. There's a wide selection available from wooden boxes to clay pots to multicolored plastic containers.

Your best bet is to select a variety of containers in different sizes to avoid confusion and give uniformity to your mobile landscape. Experienced container gardeners prefer large pots because they require less frequent watering and allow more room to experiment with flowering plants.

When growing plants in confined quarters, you're better off using a package soil mix that contains the right organic balance. Also make sure that your container drains properly. Clay pots should be soaked in water before you plant and the drainage holes covered with a fine mesh screen.

BEFORE PLANTING annuals in containers, water the soil thoroughly and allow it to settle. Once the soil has settled one to three inches below the rim of the container, transplant your annuals, making sure not to damage the root structure when you remove it from the nursery peat pot.

After you've covered the root ball, firm the soil slightly with your hands to remove any air pockets, and then water. Remember, a little extra attention in the first few days after planting will insure healthy annuals.

To get the most mileage for your efforts, choose annuals with the longest bloom periods. Select lower-growing varieties; tall-growing annuals can be a nuisance to stalk.

Plant a variety of annuals together to give your container a fuller effect. For an old-fashioned bouquet, try combining an upright zinnia, a busy marigold and a trailing lobelia for a pleasing combination.

Once you've started your annuals in containers, remember to water them daily during the hot summer months and use a liquid fertilizer at half-strength every two months to keep your plants healthy.

If you maintain your containers in top shape, you'll be rewarded with a display of exuberant color indoors and outdoors.

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