

Tips for New Gardeners Part 3 - Gardening With Containers

In a small garden, where the patio or decking occupies a significant proportion, or if you have only a yard or roof garden available, container gardening is a good solution to your planting problem. In addition, it can give you a garden that is easily rearranged, which adds an extra dimension of interest to what you have. As with your overall garden plan, a little forethought can pay dividends.

For example, the size of pots needs consideration. A whole host of small pots will add flexibility and are easy to move around but they will take more frequent watering, whereas larger pots require less watering as they contain more soil or compost but moving them is not so easy. A compromise is to have a mixture of container sizes, with larger, more architectural plants in a few large containers that will be moved infrequently, some medium sized ones that can be moved around more frequently and then some smaller, easy to move pots containing the smaller plants that can be moved round easily whenever you want. If you want a pot that will contain several different plants, a strawberry planter is ideal.

To fill your container, first place a selection of broken clay flower pot or flat stones over the drainage hole. This will allow the excess water to drain from the container but keeps the compost or soil in. Next, prepare the growing medium. You can simply use soil from your garden but a better solution is to use a mixture of soil and compost. The compost can come from your own compost heap if you have one or from a commercial source. If you are sensitive to environmental issues, use a peat free compost or if you are not really bothered about the destruction of sensitive wildlife habitat and wetlands, use a cheap grow bag from the local DIY store. The advantage of using a compost/soil mixture over just soil is that soil tends to compact unless it is frequently worked. A compacted soil is harder for plants to grow and thrive.

Fill the pot, watering the growing medium when it is one third full and two thirds full, this ensures that there is water throughout the pot, which is important for new plants, which need an initial 'watering in' in order to get them established and to reduce the shock of having been transplanted. Fill the container almost to the rim and then you are ready to plant. Take the plant or plants that are to be placed in the container, tap the side of their garden centre pot to release them. The roots will be growing in the shape of the pot so gently tease out the roots so that they are able to grow outwards. Take care not to break them too much. Use your hand or a trowel to create a space in the compost for the roots, just deep enough for the root ball. Place the roots in the growing medium and backfill with more of the growing medium. Firm the plants into the growing medium with your hands and backfill a little more. Water the plant thoroughly using a can fitted with a rose to sprinkle the water rather than pouring it in a stream. Job done!! The plant will then take a couple of weeks to establish itself, make sure that during this time it has plenty of water.

To maintain your containers, make sure that you remove weeds that start to grow and use a plant feed every few weeks as the nutrient supply in a container is limited. Over watering i.e. reaching the stage where water drains out of the bottom of the pot will leach the nutrients and so should be avoided as far as possible. If the container dries out, it can take a couple of days to wet it properly so little but often is the general rule with containers. Smaller containers will need watering every day or two, especially in warm weather. Check the wetness of the compost by feel; if you can not find any moisture within the top few cm then it needs water urgently.

And that's about it; a little imagination with planting - scented plants, herbs, veg, tomatoes, flowers will give you a pleasant and enjoyable outdoor space.

Do you want your garden to be the envy of friends, family and neighbours? Then contact Luke Harrison Gardening Services to arrange your [garden planning and maintenance](#) in the Derby - Burton area.