

DESIGN WISE

C'mon, let's get growing

Today we debut a new weekly column, called "Get Growing," that will be written by representatives of the six Staten Island clubs within the First District Federated Garden Clubs of New York State. Check out Great Kills Garden Club member Lee Gugliada's advice on container planting on **Page C 3**.



GET GROWING

Reap the benefits of container planting



Grouping containers helps conserve moisture.

Brighten small spaces,
extend plants' growing
season and grow a crop of
herbs and veggies

By LEE GUGLIADA

There are many reasons for gardening in containers, among them: It allows the gardener greater flexibility and extends the gardening space when planting areas are limited; flowering plants bring color to a patio, deck, or balcony and soften the look of the hardscape, and vegetables that need a great deal of sun can be easily positioned to take advantage of the mobility of containers.

Additionally, plants that are not hardy — like orchids — and need to winter-over in the house can be dealt with more easily when containerized. Likewise, you can get more mileage out of plants commonly treated like annuals in warm weather: Potted geraniums can be brought into a sunny window indoors in the fall to provide colorful blooms all winter and then be returned outdoors the following spring. An added advantage is that the cuttings can be made when the plants grow large and provide additional plants at no cost.

If you have only a balcony or a small courtyard available to you, potted plants can bring it to life. Putting a plant in a box, tub, or pot immediately gives it a new character by "spotlighting" it. The individual structure and character of the plants becomes more important. By the same token, containerized plants such as perennials that are out of bloom and no longer attractive can easily be relegated to a less visible area of the garden until they are once again suitable to be an attractive asset to the landscape. The best each season has to offer can be brought onstage for maximum display and then taken offstage when the peak show is past.



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE PHOTOS/JAN SOMMA-HAMMEL

LOOK UP

Hanging planters add an interesting dimension to many landscaping situations. Where space is limited, they become a necessity. You not only can accommodate many more plants by getting some of them off the floor, you can create more interest by using multiple levels. Be aware, though, that a hanging container needs more protection from sun and wind than one on the ground; it also requires more frequent watering.

Among the most useful and attractive hanging planters are moss baskets — heavy-gauge wire baskets usually lined with sphagnum moss, filled with soil and planted. Plants with trailing growth habits such as ivy geraniums, petunias, impatiens, asparagus fern, Boston fern, fuschia, orchid cactus and thunbergia are perfect for displaying in this way.

Fruits and vegetables also do well in containers. For instance, strawberry barrels are an interesting and attrac-

tive addition to container gardening. Leafy vegetables generally take well to containers, as do tomatoes, peppers, and zucchini.

Herbs are another excellent choice for planting pots. Possibilities include parsley, chives, dill, cilantro, basil, tarragon and mint. For best results grow marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage, tarragon and thyme in full sun, with little watering.

PREPARING TO PLANT

As for planting, once you've chosen a potting soil for your containers, moisten it until it's barely damp, but not wet. Stir the soil and let it sit for a day to make sure it's evenly moist. Pot your plants the next day. Adding Hydrosorce, long-lasting, super-absorbent polymer crystals, to the soil will reduce the need for frequent watering. Hydrosorce crystals are available at Home Depot under the name "Moisture Plus." These "watering crystals" absorb water and slowly release it to the roots to help avoid over-watering. Be sure your pot has good drainage holes.

When you're ready to plant, place enough soil mix in the pot, lightly tamp it down and place the plant so it is just below the pot rim.

Hold it at that level, adding enough soil to support it as you lightly tamp the soil. Finish filling to about one-quarter inch below the pot rim. The soil will settle, leaving you room to water.

Generally, plants grown in pots should be fed regularly during the active growing season. With heavy watering, nutrients leach readily through porous soil mixes.

Your container-grown plants should never be allowed to wilt, but neither should they stand in soggy soil. If you check the soil by putting a finger down an inch or two into the container you will soon learn how much to water. Grouping your containers helps conserve moisture. Always water thoroughly, filling the pots until the water runs freely from the drain holes.

To preserve your container plantings when you're away on vacation, group them near a water source out of the afternoon sun. The grouping will help keep them moist, the shade will reduce the need for water, and if they're near a hose, none will be overlooked by your vacation waterer.

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Containers can be used for vertical planting, to add interest to fences and draw the eye upward in a small garden. Here whimsical planters lend charm to their surroundings, from terracotta faces planted with a profusion of colorful oxalis to simple arrangements in a pair of old sneakers and an old watering pail, and a strawberry jar overflowing with succulents.

