

Container gardening has become very popular. It offers many advantages over traditional gardening. Container gardening is convenient and performed on a smaller scale resulting in a need for less equipment and often less work. There is no need to acquire and cultivate an area of real estate just to grow something. Container gardening allows one to grow a garden in non-traditional places. One has the liberty to grow ornamentals and/or edibles on a deck, a patio, a rooftop or wherever one wishes. Although container gardening holds similar cultural requirements as traditional gardening, there are some differences.

Now that November has arrived, both types of gardeners are shutting down for the season. The traditional gardener is cleaning the vegetable garden and flowerbeds in preparation for winter. The container gardener is making similar preparations or moving the containers indoors with the hopes of continuing to garden through the winter months.

Most container gardening involves the growing of annual plants, but what about those vessels that contain hardy perennial plants? What type of cultural care do they require for the winter months? First, it is not recommended to transport perennial plant containers indoors for the winter. These plants need to go through a dormant, cold spell in order for the plants to thrive.

One might think, since the container already contains hardy perennials, nothing needs to be done in preparation for winter. Such is not the case. Unfortunately, if the plants are left outdoors in a pot, the winter can be too extreme and, although rated hardy, these plants may still die. Winter is more stressful on potted plants than those growing in the ground. With in-ground plants, the roots are more protected from the freezing cold than those that are grown in containers. The temperature of the soil in a container can easily drop to the air temperature; whereas, plant roots growing in the ground experience considerably warmer conditions.

For container-grown perennials to overwinter successfully, I offer the following suggestions:

- Select larger pots, perhaps those that are insulated. Avoid ceramic and terracotta pots that have a tendency to crack easily if left outdoors all

winter. Containers made of wood, concrete, fiberglass or resin are more weather resistant.

- Choose extra hardy plants, ones that are at least one or two zones hardier than our Zone 5. They usually survive well if left outdoors with no extra care.
- Set the container in a garage, shed or some other shelter for the winter to avoid temperature swings. The building does not need to be heated.
- Plant the potted plant in the ground, pot and all, or take the plant out of the container and plant the plant in the ground for the winter.
- Raise the container above hard surfaces. Place wood slats beneath the pot to raise the pot slightly off the surface in order for the soil within the pot to have proper drainage. If left in contact with the surface, a layer of ice can form causing the soil to become constantly soggy.
- Place the pot on either the north or east side of the home. Although the west and south sides might seem more logical, placing on the north and/or the east minimizes the soil freezing and thawing, a major contributor to winterkill.
- Insulate the foliage. Form a wire cage around the plant and fill with leaves, or straw.

Container gardening has become a popular method of gardening. Although container gardening is often considered easier than traditional gardening, growing perennials in containers calls for extra care. The goal is getting them to survive the winter.