

## Container gardening

With the gorgeous weather we've been having, I've been itching to get outside and get my hands in the soil. I've even been think about trying to get a head start on my garden for this year. Unfortunately, I don't have a ton of room that I can convert to garden space, but there is a cement patio that I can fill with containers.

The first thing I need to do is think about what plants I would like in my garden this year. When choosing plants, consider how much light the plant needs to do well when deciding where to place the containers. A plant that needs full sun will not produce as much fruit when placed in a shady spot. Bush and dwarf type plants tend to do well in containers, as they are smaller and more compact than a regular variety of the same plant. Some plants will require supports or sturdy wire enclosures to support the growth and fruit that is produced. Large vining plants could be trained to climb a wire structure if desired.

The next thing to decide what I want to use for containers. There are a few baskets already on the patio from last year, but there is definitely room for more. Old buckets, clay pots, wooden boxes, just about anything can be a container for plants. Keep in mind that there should be holes in the bottom so that excess water can leave the soil. You may also want to think about what plants are going into which containers. Containers like clay pots are considered porous, because water can escape out the sides of the container, drying the soil out faster than a nonporous container. A plant that wilts easily and needs a lot of water might do better in a container that isn't porous. Wood is considered semi porous, because it allows some water to escape, but not as much as unglazed clay.

Something else to think about is what soil you'll be using. Garden soil doesn't perform well in containers, as it tends to compact easily. The soil around Kearney also tends to contain a lot of clay, making it very heavy and awkward to work with. Most potting mixes contain a combination of peat, perlite, vermiculite, sand, and bark pieces. You can create your own soil using three or four of these components, depending on what you are looking for in a soil mix. If you are reusing a container from last year, it will need new soil, as the plants last year may have used most of the nutrients. You should also consider whether or not you want to fill the entire container with soil. In larger containers, you could fill the bottom of the container with things that don't biodegrade or compact easily, such as empty water bottles or old milk cartons, reducing the amount of space for the soil. This can reduce the cost of the soil, the amount of soil needed, and the weight of the container, making it easier to move.

Container gardening is a great alternative for those who don't have the space for a garden, or to make it easier for you to garden by increasing the height of the plants. Choose want plants you would like to grow, but consider the needs of the plant. Don't forget to give support to the plants that need it, such as peas. Decide what you'll be using as containers, but feel free to be creative with it! As long as you don't forget to put holes in the bottom for drainage. If you have any questions or would like to suggest a topic for me to write about, feel free to contact me at the Buffalo County Extension Office, at 308-236-1235, or [mearnest2@unl.edu](mailto:mearnest2@unl.edu).