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## Plants for Container Gardening

Let's take a look at some plants for great containers:

Annuals are unbeatable for long-lasting color and prolific blooms. There are endless colors, shapes and sizes to meet any need – whether for a hanging basket, window box or large formal planter. Annuals are also inexpensive which makes it affordable to freshen your containers as the season progresses. Annuals that thrive in cooler weather can be replaced with more heat tolerant varieties in summer. You can also play with design – changing plants to work with different color or texture combinations.

As container gardening has become more sophisticated, gardeners are experimenting with perennials and ornamental grasses in pots. Using perennials requires more thought in the design process because most have a fairly short bloom time. Consequently, varieties with longer than normal bloom times or with intriguing foliage are most effective in pots. Long bloomers include Achillea (yarrow), Agastache, Campanula, Coreopsis, Gaillardia, Geranium (perennial not annual geranium), Hemerocallis (daylily) and Scabiosa (pincushion plant). Perennials with interesting foliage include Heuchera (coral bells) Hosta, red or burgundy-foliaged plants such as Red-leaved Thrift (Armeria) or silver-leaved plants such as Artemesia (sage). Succulents such as Hens & Chicks, Sedum and Agave are striking in containers.

Ornamental grasses add texture, motion, and autumn through winter interest to containers. They offer a wide variety of heights and foliage color while their seed heads can inject a bit of drama into your design.

Using shrubs in containers adds a sense of permanence to your potted garden. Your best choices are compact shrubs that will be happy for years in the right size container. There are compact varieties of nearly every popular shrub including rose, potentilla, barberry (Berberis), viburnum and spiraea, as well as evergreens such as boxwood (Buxus), yew (Taxus) and Oregon Grape Holly (Mahonia). Naturally compact plants such as Caryopteris and Apache plume (Fallugia) are well-suited for container gardens.

It's even possible to include small trees in your container garden. With their very slow growth, Japanese maples are a natural for pots. Other good choices include redbuds (Cercis), flowering cherries and plums (Prunus), Star magnolia (Magnolia stellata) and vine maple (Acer circinatum).

When selecting either trees or shrubs, look for those with several seasons of interest: spring flowers, fall foliage color, fall or winter berries and interesting bark color or texture. This will keep your containers interesting as long as possible.

It's even possible to have an edible garden in pots. We don't have room here to discuss all the different possibilities but be assured that most vegetables and herbs can be grown in containers. Small fruiting shrubs and dwarf fruit trees are also at home in pots. There are several excellent books on this subject, including "McGee & Stuckey's Bountiful Container: Create Container Gardens of Vegetables, Herbs, Fruits, and Edible Flowers" by Rose Marie Nichols McGee and Maggie Stuckey and "The Edible Container Garden: Growing Fresh Food in Small Spaces" by Michael Guerra.

Don't let a lack of in-ground planting space keep you from gardening. You can still get your hands dirty and enjoy the beauty of a garden with well-designed containers.