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growing guide

Techniques: Container Gardening

You can't pick up a popular magazine today or watch any of the lifestyle shows without hearing about "Container Gardening."

Why all the buzz about container gardens?

It can be as easy as it sounds -- or it can be as intricate as an ornate wedding cake! Whichever level of work you prefer is what will work for you!

What are the advantages of Container Gardening?

1. Higher than ground level so easy to plant, weed, water, and change out.
2. Adds another level of interest to your landscape
3. Can create a beautiful visual break, or wall separating one area from another or hiding an unattractive feature of the landscape
4. Can overcome poor soil
5. Can be located on a hard-surface, like a patio, deck or even in a high-rise
6. Can be portable, to be moved to where needed when needed.
7. Easy to add seasonal interest.
8. Easy to add architectural interest in the selection of the container.

How do I get started?

You can do on your own, or come to Hoerr Nursery for help.

Our Hoerr Nursery services include:

1) Bring a container into Container Cove and indicate your preferences in terms of sun, color, plants, foliage, etc., and we'll plant it for you. Depending on how many containers are in the "cue" ahead of you, we may be able to plant it while you wait.

We charge only for the plants and for the soil used in the container.

2) Buy containers from us and we will plant them for you.

3) Buy containers and ask for recommendations on what to put in them. We'll be happy to help you select your plants. There is no charge for this advice.

4) Attend a Make-It & Take-It event at which you'll create a container garden.

5) Pick up one of our products such as "Patio Pronto," a pre-planted and ready-to-

use component that you simply drop into the soil in your container.

Self-Serve Container services include:

1. Select a container or containers that appeal to you, plants, and soil.
2. Attend one of our GardenTalks on containers (these are free and offered at various times throughout the year).
3. Pick up one of the dozens of pre-planted containers we have at the nursery.

How do I know what to plant?

We recommend a selection process we fondly refer to as: Thrillers/Fillers/Spillers. What this means is: use something tall and dramatic, (Thrillers), something that fills in the main horizontal space in the container, (Fillers), and a vine or something that "spills" over the edge, (Spillers).

Consider changing the display with the seasons. For Fall and Winter, many natural wild or "spent" examples from the landscape can be incorporated. Even silk products or pinecones or sticks sprayed a seasonal color can add impact in a container.

Other factors to consider:

- Use plants that have similar needs for sun and water.
- Consider foliage and bloom color.
- Consider herbs, vegetables, groundcovers with blooming annuals.
- Consider a perennial-planted container. The container is "big enough" as long as it has enough volume of dirt that it won't freeze during the winter. Many perennial containers will overwinter and begin growing again in the spring. But for this type of container, select something that can handle the freezing and thawing through the seasons.
- Consider the material for your container: will you want to move it? Will you leave it out in the winter? Does the design/color you want come in the material you have in mind?

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25% off Container Cove Planter

Colorful Annual Planted Containers

25% off any Container Cove Planter. No cash value. One coupon per customer per transaction. Coupon required. May not be used with any other offers. Exp. June 13, 2009 smwb041809

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Techniques: How to Plant a Tree and Tree Care

Get off on the right foot: Dig the correct hole.

Don't dig any deeper than the original nursery container or the root ball, but always make a tapering hole about twice as wide. (Digging deeper could cause settling and create major problems.) Mix in enough organic matter with your native soil until you obtain a 50-50 mix.

If the plant is in a plastic container, gently but firmly grasp it at the soil line and remove it. Peat pots or other plantable containers should have the lip around the top cut or torn off and be scored down the sides in two or three places. On balled & burlapped material, it is not necessary to completely remove the burlap. Instead position the plant, level it, and backfill a bit to stabilize. Cut the strings, remove any nails pinning the burlap and with your hands or a shovel, scrunch the burlap down around the ball. The burlap rots and roots grow through it. If any burlap is left exposed to the atmosphere after planting, it can act as wick on hot, windy days and pull moisture away from the root system. Some larger plants are contained in a wire basket. There is no need to remove it. Set the plant so that ground level is the same as in the container or root ball. Backfill with the amended soil and water well with Ferti-lome Root Stimulator. Some settling will probably occur around the edge, add more soil and firm it in. Don't pack it. Use the remaining soil to form a shallow bowl around the perimeter of the hole and fill the basin with plain water.

Mulching

Make a minimum 4 – 8 foot diameter circle, and mulch with a 2" layer of bark mulch. Keep the mulch at least 2 – 3 inches away from the trunk to keep the trunk wood dry and deter burrowing rodents.

Water

Water once each week unless you receive at least an inch of slow rainfall. Watering too often can be more of a problem than too seldom. Red Maple varieties, Birch, Bald Cypress and Sweet Gum may require

watering twice a week during hot weather.

You may use a soaker hose for 2 – 4 hours per week to slowly trickle water into the area around the base of the tree. It is critical, for establishment, to continue watering during July and August.

Tree Wrap

Until the tree is about 6 inches in diameter or develops a rough textured bark, we recommend that you wrap your tree with tree wrap from November 1 through April 1 each year to minimize winter damage.

Purchase tree wrap at **Hoerr Nursery** and encircle the tree with a continuous piece of tree wrap from the base up to the first branch. Tie off the wrap with degradable twine or cotton string. You will remove the wrap each year, but in case you forget, the degradable tie will disintegrate and fall off - which is important or else the tie may strangle the tree.

Staking

As a general rule, we do not recommend staking trees. Normally, trees benefit from the natural movement of wind and weather. However there are a few situations in which staking is beneficial:

- if yours is a particularly windy location, or
- The tree you installed is disproportionately top-heavy in relation to the ball, or
- If you are planting on a severe slope, or
- You are planting a "container" tree...

then, please ask us about staking. We have staking kits for sale at Hoerr Nursery.

Insecticide

Newly planted trees and trees stressed from heat, drought, excessive water, restricted roots or other factors are susceptible to borers and other insects. There is now a new insecticide product available for a single application in early May for control of a variety of insects. Bayer Tree and Shrub Insect Control (Imidacloprid) can be applied around the

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309/691-4561
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base of the tree for season-long control. This applies to all trees except bald cypress & evergreens. Follow printed label directions. Call us for further help or advice if tree problems occur.

Fertilizing

The first season, use root stimulator according to directions, using a 10 – 20 gallon solution of water every two to three weeks during June, July and August. After the first season, we recommend granular Ferti-lome Tree and Shrub Food.

Critter Control

Expect deer and rabbit damage no matter where you live. The best protection outside of a 10' high double mesh fence is Ferti-lome. This One Works for discouraging deer and Ropel for deterring deer, rabbits and many other nuisance animals. These products do not hurt the critters but they leave an atrocious taste in their mouths.

Pruning

Newly planted trees and shrubs generally require no pruning; the plant needs all the reserves in its branches to establish quickly in your landscape. Of course, broken or damaged limbs should be removed and minor shaping is fine. The ideal pruning time varies with the plant. As a rule don't prune from August through mid-October. Late summer pruning can induce new growth that won't have time to harden off before winter.

Rule of Thumb: The best time to prune is when your shears are sharp. The point is that most people under prune. But the ideal time to prune flowering shrubs is after the show over, when the flowers are no longer ornamental.

So prune spring flowering shrubs such as Forsythia, Flowering Almond Viburnum, etc., after the spring show. Prune summer flowering shrubs such as the Dwarf Pink Spirea group, Potentilla, Rose of Sharon, Smokebush, etc., in the spring or after the show, just don't prune too late in the year.





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Techniques: Living Wreath

By making a living wreath, you can add a unique addition to your garden décor. You may purchase a pre-made wreath form or make your own.

Hoerr Nursery has the New Zealand Moss wreath forms that include the moss.

Just follow the steps below and you can create your own masterpiece.

Start by getting your cuttings from your established plants, your cuttings should be approximately 2 inches long. Remove the bottom leaves off the stems, exposing about an inch of stem. (Keep in mind that it is illegal to take cuttings off plants species that have a registered trademark.)

Once you get your cuttings prepared, lay them out on a counter for 2 or 3 days. This allows them to form a callus over the cut area. This callous area keeps them from rotting later on.

Your cuttings are now ready to be placed in your wreath.

Start by dipping your cuttings into a rooting hormone.

Then place your larger cuttings randomly around the wreath, use a pencil, chopstick, or awl to make a hole before inserting the cutting.

Now put in your smaller cuttings until your wreath is complete.

It takes approximately 4 weeks for the cuttings to root, so don't hang your wreath until that time.

Place your wreath in a flower pot tray and pour water in the center. Water it often, about every 2 weeks. Use the same procedure even when the wreath is established. Don't over water your wreath, especially in the beginning when the roots are starting to form.

Fertilize every few weeks with a ¼-strength liquid fertilizer.

Most plants love lots of sun, so place your wreath in a bright sunny location.

To keep your wreath's shape, once a month go over it and prune the taller plants.

Plants will get leggy in low light, if this happens, you can take your whole wreath and make a dish garden. Simply fill a large pot with planting mix, nestle the whole wreath into it, and in time, the plant will root itself in.



*Have fun with your living wreath!
They make great gifts, too!*

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Techniques: Strawberry Jar How-To

Watering your plants in a strawberry jar can sometimes frustrate the most experienced gardener. Not only is it difficult keeping your plants evenly moist with the plants in various levels in the jar, but most jars are made of clay and usually have sun-loving plants in them. In the hot sun they dry out quickly. The design of the jar presents another problem, getting water to the plants on the sides of the jar.

Here's a solution:

1. Take a section of PVC pipe (one inch in diameter) and cut it to the height of the jar.
2. Decide which end you want to be the bottom end. Using a 3/16 inch or 1/4 inch drill bit, drill holes on the sides the entire length of the pipe. As you near the bottom, drill fewer holes.
3. Cover the bottom end of the pipe with a cork or putty; make sure that the bottom will sit flatly against the bottom of the inside of the container.

4. You can use 3 pipes or just one, if using just one make sure to place it off center, keeping the drainage hole open.

5. Hold pipe or pipes in position, while adding moistened potting mix up to the bottom of the lowest pocket.

6. Start adding plants by working in layers. Squeeze soil around the root ball of a plant so it will fit into the planting pocket. Work from the outside in and snuggle the root ball into the pocket. When this is completed, reach inside the jar and spread out the roots. Apply another layer of potting mix and work your way to the top.

7. When the planting process is complete, pour water directly into the pipe. Since the bottom is blocked, the water has no where to go out through the holes and sideways towards the plants.





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Techniques: Potting Soils

Potting soils serve the vital functions of both stabilizing the plant and being the source of water and nutrient uptake. They may vary in weight and composition, and therefore must be selected according to the desired final use.

Commercial potting soils are usually "soiless," which means no natural topsoil was used in the mix, but rather peat moss, composted barks, drainage materials like perlite, and other nutrients and conditioners to make the media stable. It is a bland soil, so the fertilization can be controlled to benefit the specific crop being grown. It is also sterile, so no weed seed or pathogens are present.

Homemade potting soil uses topsoil as a prime ingredient to introduce natural microorganisms and minor nutrients. It is usually heavier in weight, and is excellent where pots cannot be watered frequently. Container gardens using homemade potting soil still need regular fertilization and can benefit from being sterilized to remove harmful pathogens and weed seed.

To sterilize soil, fill a pan with the damp soil mix, cover with foil, and bake on an outdoor grill. Use an instant read thermometer to confirm the internal soil temperature has reached 180°, and hold there for 30 minutes. Allow to cool before using.

Potting soil ingredients:

Topsoil - harvested from your garden, pre-cleaned of obvious debris, screened to remove oversized chunks

Peat moss - medium to fine milled, natural brown, baled

Compost - from home composting systems, urban compost piles or purchased mushroom compost

Sharp sand - coarse mason or torpedo sand

Vermiculite - expanded mica

Perlite - natural volcanic stone

Charcoal - horticultural grade, untreated

Nutrients/Amendments - bone meal, lime (dolomitic lime has manganese), potash, timed release fertilizers, etc.

Recipes

Simple General Mix:

Equal parts topsoil, peat moss, perlite or vermiculite

General Mix:

3 parts peat moss

2 parts perlite

2 parts soil

1 part vermiculite

1 part coarse sand

1/4 part fine horticultural charcoal

To 2 gallons of mix add:

2 cups bonemeal, 10 tablespoons dolomitic lime, Ferti-lome Start-N-Grow timed release fertilizer (according to package directions)

Cacti Mix:

1 part compost

3 parts perlite or vermiculite

1 part coarse sand

1 part fine silt

Seed Starting Mix:

14 parts fine peat moss

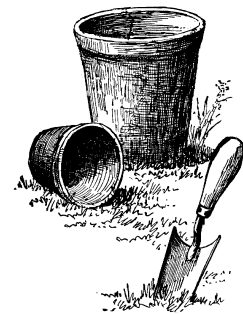
3 parts perlite

3 parts vermiculite

1 part dolomitic lime

Ferti-lome Start-N-Grow timed release fertilizer (according to package directions)

For your convenience we offer several premixed soils for various types of plant matter. Please ask a Hoerr Garden Center employee to help you select the correct soil for your needs.



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Techniques: Soil Testing

The purpose of soil testing is to identify nutrient or content imbalances that would reduce plant performance.

We use the test both before planting to make corrections, as well as after to help in diagnostic analysis. It isn't critical that you check your soil before every kind of landscape or garden project; every soil will grow some kind of a plant, even if only weeds! The black or dark brown topsoils of Illinois usually yield pretty good results without testing. But many of the homes built today have their topsoil stripped away, or covered by the poor subsoil excavated during basement installation.

Also, some plants such as blueberries or hydrangeas have specific requirements for soil acidity.

To ensure gardening success, have the soil tested three to four weeks prior to doing the work. Soil modifications and some fertilizations are done before working up the soil. The soil test report you receive back will indicate what adjustments you need to make to the soil. Soil modification may not be economically feasible for large lawns, although it can make a significant difference in the turf's performance. Compost, sphagnum peat, and manure can all be used as amendments to poor soil structure. By adding these to clay or sandy soils, you can improve plant performance through deeper rooting, better nutrient uptake, and improved disease resistance.

Soil fertility is amended according to the soil test recommendations. If phosphorous or potassium is needed, it should be incorporated into the soil; add nitrogen after seeding or planting. Rototill or cultivate fertilizers and amendments to a minimum six-inch depth. This function loosens compacted soil for easier rooting of plants.

Soil acidity, also known as pH, affects nutrient uptake in plants. It is especially important to understand pH when planting acid-loving plants. The pH scale runs from 1 to 14, with 7 being a neutral pH. Anything less than 7 is considered acidic and anything over 7 is alkaline. For most plants, a pH of 6.5 is desirable.

Most of the soils in Central Illinois tend to be alkaline, and that creates problems for acid loving plants like hydrangea or hollies. In such cases, pH can be lowered by amending the soil with granular sulfur. Soil sulfur works best when it is mixed into the soil and given up to a year to undergo the necessary reactions to lower the pH. It is, however, one of the best ways to make a lasting pH change in the soil.

For quick fixes, Miracid, Copperas, or any other acidic fertilizer can be used. Aluminum sulfate is often used with hydrangeas to obtain a blue flower color in the bigleaf hydrangea varieties such as Endless Summer or All Summer Beauty.

How to Collect a Soil Sample for Testing

Note—It is easiest to take soil samples when the soil is somewhat moist. Avoid taking samples when the ground is too wet.

1. Select the area to be tested.
2. Take 3-5 soil samples from the designated area by using a flat spade to take a "slice" of soil
3. A lawn sample should be taken at a depth of 4 inches. Tree, shrub, or garden samples should be taken at a depth of 7 inches. Discard the top 1-2 inches, since it usually contains mulch, grass, twigs or other debris.
4. Combine the multiple samples in a bucket, and mix together well.
5. From the mixture, remove approximately one cup of soil and place in a Ziploc bag. Please write your name and phone number on the bag.

Bring the sample to:
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Soil samples can be sent direct to
Mowers Soil Testing Plus
117 E. Main St.
Toulon, IL 61483

A small fee covers the cost of testing your soil.



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Techniques: Seed Starting Indoors

Starting seed indoors is both easy and enjoyable. While everything may still be looking a little drab outside, you've got fresh herb, vegetable, or flower plants popping up on the windowsill. This is also a delightful project to involve your kids in, too!

Supplies you'll need:

- Seed starting soil. It is a finely milled potting soil, with good drainage.
- Containers with bottom drainage holes to allow excess water to leak out.
- Labels to keep plants identified until they grow large enough to recognize.
- Plastic bags or grow covers are optional; they can help keep moisture levels even.
- Catch trays to protect the surface.

A word about seed selection

It's tempting to try many different kinds of seeds indoors, but it's wise to plan ahead. You'll first want to decide what plants to grow from seed. Read the packet labels; you'll find some seeds take a long time to sprout, others need special attention during germination, and some are best planted directly outdoors. Organize your packets according to indoor or outdoor (direct in the garden) seeding. Further sequence your indoor seeds to start at the proper time. Usually a packet will estimate how many days before last frost (around Mother's Day in Central Illinois) to start the seed indoors. Starting seeds such as tomatoes too early indoors yields leggy, almost unmanageable plants.

Sowing the seed

- Potting soils are dusty, so cover your work surface with newspaper to help keep things clean.
- Fill the pots or seeding tray a little less than level full with soil. Some settling of the soil will occur after watering.
- Following the seed pack directions, scatter some of the seed on the soil surface, and press lightly with your fingers. You may randomly scatter, or in rows if you're using a tray. Most seeds like more potting soil dusted over top, but refer to the seed packet for details.
- Water very carefully with a gentle stream of clear, tepid water. You may use a small watering can with or without a sprinkler head. Repeat the watering process a couple of times, until the soil feels thoroughly moistened and excess

liquid drains from the bottom. Using a spray misting bottle may help.

- Label the pots.

Finishing the process

You may want to place the seeded pots and their catch trays in large, clear plastic bags, or under a grow dome. This helps trap moisture and warmth, and speeds up the germination process. Be careful, however, not to seal things tight. Too much moisture can cause rot, so leave the bag just loosely tucked under, or the dome slightly ajar. Place the finished trays near a warm, bright location, but not in direct sun. Too warm, and the tender seedlings can be quickly injured.

Care during sprouting

- Check your seed pots every day. Different seeds sprout at different times. As you see the first sprouts emerge, be prepared to begin moving them out of any germinating bags, and to less warm conditions. When it appears all seeds in a pot have germinated, they need bright sun, without cover, and they need to be checked daily for water needs .
- If you chose to plant any seed in trays, you'll want to transplant the individual seedlings into cell pack or peat pots after they 4 to 6 leaves appear.
- Your young seedlings would benefit from a fertilization with a weak (half strength) water soluble fertilizer, like Ferti-lome Blooming and Rooting or Fish Emulsion.
- Plan to "harden off" your seedlings by setting them outdoors on warm spring days, in a protected location, to begin acclimating to the garden. Bring them in on cool nights.

Enjoy!



Hoerr Nursery
8020 N. Shade Tree Dr.
Peoria, IL 61615
309/691-4561
FAX309/691-1834



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growing guide

Techniques: Pruning & Staking

Pruning is needed to keep your plant healthy, vigorous and productive.

More commonly, pruning is used to shape plants. Understanding only a few simple principles will provide you with the confidence to remove the necessary limbs and branches of your plants. If you make the wrong cut, be assured the plant will grow back. By understanding how the plant grows you can make the correct pruning decisions.

Tools

The best tools to use in pruning are bypass pruners, bypass loppers, and a pruning saw, all sharpened. The bypass blades are preferable since they are less injurious to the plant; the anvil type (one cutting blade) bruises the plant tissue. Pruning shears are used for branches under 1/2" diameter. Use loppers for 1/2" to 1" diameter branches. Over 1" thick, the branch should be cut with a pruning saw. *Attempting to cut branches with improper tools can quickly ruin the tool as well as damage the plant.*

Order of Pruning

To begin, remove dead and diseased wood first. In fact, don't wait for an "ideal" pruning time to do this; the sooner it is removed the better for the plant. For diseased wood, remove 2" to 3" of healthy tissue along with the diseased portion, this will help to prevent spreading of the disease through the plant. In addition, when cutting diseased branches, sterilize the pruning tool with rubbing alcohol, Lysol spray, or 10% bleach solution. Doing this will eliminate spreading the disease throughout the plant and to other plants. Some gardeners carry a bucket of solution with them. Others prefer to use alcohol or bleach 'wipes'. Clean the blades of your tools before each cut.

Second, remove suckers and watersprouts. Suckers are small branches that grow at the base of the trunk and occasionally along the roots. If left, these can overpower the desired specimen, especially a grafted one. These are commonly found on crabapples, fruit trees, contorted hazelnuts, hawthorns, lilacs, and serviceberries. Watersprouts are branches that grow vertically off main branches. Since they rarely flower or fruit, grow rapidly, and destroy the shape of the

tree, remove them yearly. Crabapples, fruit trees, flowering cherries, and plums commonly develop this growth type, as will many other species that are heavily trimmed the previous growing season.

Third, remove weak crotches where one branch attaches to another in a "V" shape with a 30-degree or less angle. These crotches are prone to splitting as the tree matures.

Fourth, remove crossing branches, ones that grow into another, and branches that rub together. By doing this the tree will appear more natural and will be structurally sound.

Finally, prune for the desired shape of the plant, whether natural or formal. Being familiar with the mature shape of the tree is helpful. It is difficult to keep an open rounded tree in a narrow vertical form.

Making Proper Cuts

When making the cut, do not leave a stub. Prune back to a bud, branch, or trunk. For a twig, make a clean cut, 1/4" above the bud, slanting away from the bud. To remove branches make the final cut at the branch collar. Although branch collars can vary between species, they are generally a thickened ridge area at the base of the branch (see figure 1). No longer is a flush cut considered appropriate; rather, at the base of the stem and at the top of the collar is where the quickest healing will occur after pruning.

When removing 2" or larger branches undercut the branch 6" from the final cut. Next, at the top of the branch, about 6 1/2" from the final cut, remove the branch. This will leave a 6" stub which should be removed at the branch collar. This process will allow removal of the branch without tearing or ripping the bark (see figure 2).

Pruning Times

Shade Trees

Prune in late February to early April. Exceptions: those trees that bleed such as Birch, Elm, and Maple. Prune trees in mid to late summer.

Ornamental Trees

Spring-flowering trees should be pruned

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8020 N. Shade Tree Dr.
Peoria, IL 61615
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will remove the next crop of flowers. E.g.,
Crabapple, Magnolia, Redbud, Juniper,
Arborvitae, Yew

Broadleaf Evergreens

May/June /Spring/Early Summer/Fall

Azalea, Boxwood, English Ivy
Euonymus, Pyracantha, Holly, Rhododendron

Fruit Trees

Prune fruit trees late winter to early spring,
preferably on a nice day in February or early
March.

Central-Leader System: apples, pears, blue
plums, sweet cherries

Open-Center System: peaches, nectarines,
red plums—prune up to half the new growth

Either System: apricots, sour cherries

Brambles

Everbearing – once in early spring, as soon
as possible after first crop by removing
fruited canes

Black Raspberries – Remove old canes after
fruiting; pinch top at 3' to 4'. May do tips
again in late summer

Red and Yellow Raspberries – once in early
spring, as soon as possible after fruiting
Do not summer top.

Blackberries – Once in early spring and after
harvest

Blueberries – Early spring and mid-summer

Currants and Gooseberries – early spring

Grapes – early spring back to main stem
leaving some branches

