

This is Steve Rulison bringing you information on Shore friendly living and gardening from the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension. From my perch near the mouth of Occohannock Creek, I recorded a half- inch of rain last week. This past week has been beautiful and if you haven't already planted your vegetable gardens, now is just the right time. If you prefer flowers to vegetables or you would like to keep your back from hurting, today we will talk a little about container gardening and how gardening in containers allows you to have and enjoy many ornamental and food supplying plants. Each planted container will have its own personality. You can even create container scenes. They can range from dramatic to subtle, and from grand to petite.

Containers come in myriad sizes, shapes, and styles. They are made of many materials, including clay, ceramic, metal, wood, and plastic. You can use practically anything as a container; even an old bathtub or boot. Most containers will need to have at least one drainage hole, and preferably more. Place a piece of screen or mesh material over the drainage holes to keep the soil in the container. If you have a container without holes, either drill holes in the bottom, or place the plant in a growing container with bottom holes inside the first container. In the latter case, to avoid blocking the drainage holes of the growing container, insert a "spacer", like small pieces of brick, in the bottom of the container without holes. Be prepared to remove the growing container from the decorative pot during periods of high rainfall to avoid flooding the pot.

The size of the container depends on the size of the plants you are growing. Most any type of plant can be grown in a container to showcase foliage, flowers, and fruits. You can grow vegetables, annuals, herbaceous perennials, and shrubs and small trees such as butterfly bush or Japanese maple. Tropical plants are becoming quite popular for outdoor use as annuals. Very showy plants, such as banana and mandevilla vine, offer an attractive and lush presentation.

When using more than one species in a container, remember to vary their size, form, color, and texture to maximize the plant combination appeal. Taller plants are usually placed in the center of the container, with shorter or trailing plants placed near the sides. Also remember to match plants based on their cultural needs, like light and water requirements.

Your container composition is limited only by your imagination, available growing conditions, and the size and maneuverability of the container.

For answers to Gardening questions and more, call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361.