

**BBC**  
**Gardeners'**  
**World** magazine

# Masterclass

## ON-DEMAND



## **Creative Containers**

### **FAQs reference sheet**

From Emma Crawford,  
Gardening Editor

#### **Do I have to use a specially made container?**

No, you can recycle anything that holds compost, including a sink or bucket, as long as it has at least one drainage hole.

#### **What materials are best for containers?**

There are lots of different materials:

- Terracotta looks great and is porous, so good for plants that like free drainage like succulents
- Buy pots that are frost proof

- Timber needs a plastic lining so it doesn't deteriorate too quickly and can be changed to make a different look with a lick of paint
- Metal looks good in a modern garden but gets hot in sunshine so is best for tough plants

### **What compost should I use?**

Peat-free multipurpose compost is fine for seasonal displays but sometimes it's best to use a specialist compost:

- Acid-loving plants like blueberries, rhododendrons and camellias need ericaceous compost
- Succulents need a free-draining compost, so add gravel or horticultural sand to your compost mixture
- Trees, shrubs and plants that will be in a container for more than nine months benefit from a soil-based compost, such as a John Innes mixture. This will break down more slowly than multipurpose compost and soil holds onto nutrients well, slowly releasing them to the plant over time

### **What's the best way to make my container look good?**

Try a 'thriller, spiller, filler' design, where all three elements are included in one pot. Co-ordinate the plant and container colours and plant in threes and fives, which look more natural than twos and fours. Make sure the size of the fully-grown plants and container are balanced – neither should be too big or too small.

## **Can I grow fruit and veg in containers?**

Yes, easily. Look for compact fruit varieties. Blueberries and strawberries do well in pots. Salads, herbs, tomatoes, compact beans and short carrots are good options too. Provide supports for tall plants and plenty of water and plant food.

## **How should I prepare for planting?**

Give plants a thorough soak before you plant them in the container. Remove their containers just before planting and if the roots are congested, gently tease them out to encourage them to grow outwards into the compost.

## **Do plants in containers need more water than plants in the ground?**

Yes, rain does not usually penetrate containers well, so the plants need extra help from you.

## **What's the best way to water containers?**

Most of the time a watering can or hose is enough, but if you're going away you can buy slow-release drip waterers or timed irrigation systems that release water at regular intervals.

## **How should I feed my container plants?**

Add controlled-release fertiliser to your compost on planting, during warm weather it provides to nutrients just when they need them most. You can also boost container plants with liquid feed added to the watering can.

## **Do I need to feed my container plants in winter?**

No, plants don't grow much in winter, so you don't need to feed them.

## **Can I mulch my container display?**

Yes, you can use the same mulches as you would on beds or decorate the top of your container with coloured glass or gravel. Mulch deters weed seedlings and slows down water evaporation. In spring you can scrape off the top of the compost, add plant food and water, then add mulch or more compost to refresh your container and boost your plants.

## **Do plants in containers get attacked by pests and diseases?**

Yes, just as much as plants in beds. Squirrels, slugs and vine weevils are generally the worst pests.

## **How should I protect my container from squirrels?**

Squirrels are fond of bulbs, such as tulips, so after planting them, cover the top of your container with chicken wire and fasten it down.

## **How should I protect my container from slugs?**

Organic slug pellets will prevent slug and snail infestations. Nematodes you water on are available too.

## **How should I protect my container from vine weevil?**

Buy biological control nematodes to water onto your container with a watering can in late-spring and early-autumn.

## **Can I reuse plants and compost from old container displays?**

Yes, replant perennials in your borders to give them a new lease of life. As long as compost is pest free it can also be used in your borders as a mulch around your plants.

## **What can I do to protect container displays in winter?**

Move them to a sheltered spot and for extra protection wrap both the plants and pot in horticultural fleece.

## **What's the best way to move containers?**

Containers are heavy, so ask a companion to help with lifting. You can buy wheeled trolleys like sack trucks or round flat ones on castors. If you're lifting heavy materials such as pots or compost sacks, ensure you bend your knees and keep a straight back. Wear gloves and suitably sturdy footwear.