

YEAR-ROUND GARDENING

The Frugal Gardener - Container Gardening

Eileen Tully, Colorado Master Gardener

A colorful container of blooming plants is a beautiful addition to any outdoor setting. You can spend hundreds of dollars on gorgeous containers, but frugal gardeners go with inexpensive pots and focus on the plants that fill them with color, fragrance and motion. You can create striking containers for little money and have fun in the process.

Under \$25.00 – Large Containers – at least 24” diameter

- Plant a hybrid tea rose. Just one. They are available around \$20.00. Find one that is suited for our climate and has a high ARS score over 7.0 and you'll really score. It will give you blooms from mid-June to frost. Surround the rose with an inexpensive filler plant, six sweet



Photo courtesy of Eileen Tully

- Or, better yet, plant something from your garden. I dig up a few Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*) ground cover plants and put them around the edge of the container. If you mound mulch around the rose in autumn and get it near some protection, like a west wall, the rose will come back. I have a container grown 'Queen Elizabeth' rose that's five years old.
- For dramatic height, privacy and graceful motion on breezy days, plant a grass like zebra grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*). It can grow four to seven feet in a single season. That's a sizable bang for your buck. If your yard lacks privacy three large containers of zebra grass can make a living wall for part of your yard.
- Dahlias are one of the most dramatic summer flowers, and they are easy to grow in a large container. Purchase tubers and plant now. Wind can blow over top heavy plants so place them in sheltered locations.

- Tomatoes, the determinate kind, will thrive in a large container. Determinate tomatoes are bred to grow to a compact height then put out their fruit. Look for the symbol DET on the plant label. Roma, Better Bush and Celebrity are examples of determinate tomatoes. A few marigolds planted in the container add color and are a good companion plant.

Under \$15.00 – Medium Size Containers – around 14” to 16” diameter.

- A six pack of annuals can fill a container, once they mature. You can get dramatic effects with a container of pansies, verbena, marigolds or zinnias. The annual vinca is a good choice in deer prone areas.
- Go exotic. All you need is a single Hibiscus or Mandevilla plant in a mid-size container. These plants are divas and don't want competition. Place them near garden seating to increase enjoyment.
- Vegetables and herbs are naturals for mid-size containers. Lettuce, spinach and Swiss chard grow easily. For convenient salad making, place containers near the kitchen door.
- Parsley, dill, sage, rosemary, thyme and oregano are herbs that are inexpensive and easy to grow.

Free – or Almost Free

- Want to inspire a young gardener? A packet of easy-to-handle and easy-to-plant Nasturtium seeds (about \$2.00) will get them excited about gardening. It takes a couple of weeks for them to emerge but the results as they grow and grow are amazing. A mid-size container is recommended.
- Dig up and divide perennials. One example: Sedum 'Autumn Joy' comes up early in spring, and when divided and transplanted to a container it grows uniformly bushy until bloom time in August. A few other suggestions of perennials to divide – Shasta daisy, bugleweed, tall phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), asters.

Lastly, Make Your Own Potting Soil.

The really frugal gardener looks for all kinds of ways to save money. Mixing your own potting media can be one way to stretch gardening dollars. For a lightweight soil mix Canadian sphagnum peat moss, soil or compost, perlite and vermiculite in equal parts. Peat moss is hydrophobic (repels water) so be sure to thoroughly dampen it before mixing and planting.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by ask.extension.org. any time day or night. Monday to Thursday from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. you can phone 520-7684 or emailing CSUmq2@elpasoco.com .

For current garden tips visit www.facebook.com/ColoradoMasterGardeners.EPC

For current classes visit elpaso.extension.colostate.edu.