

FOR A GARDEN ACCENT... HANG IT



Dwight Hall*

Decorative landscape accent — hanging baskets for charm and color in the outdoor living area.

Hanging baskets can add a new dimension of beauty and charm to the home landscape. This unusual display of plants helps to create a delightful atmosphere even in hard-to-use shaded areas and in the vertical spaces of interior courts, entrance areas, overhanging eaves and carports. Plants in hanging baskets can also add lively touches to outdoor living areas and beneath trees. They are quite useful to the gardener with limited or otherwise useless planting areas. Apartment dwellers with a balcony for a backyard will delight in gardening with baskets. These space savers are also ideal for mobile home units and small urban homegrounds.

Find the Right Location

The creative gardener has a chance to discover unusual plants and interesting methods to display them. Because baskets put foliage and flowers at or above eye level, they are most effective as accents for outdoor living areas or garden focal points. But basket boldness in the landscape calls for restraint and

*Area landscape horticulturist, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Texas A&M University Agricultural Research and Extension Center at Overton.

simplicity. Too many baskets can spoil the effect of accent. One must consider the surrounding landscape. Similar to accent mirrors indoors, the hanging basket must have good background outdoors—a key location with simplicity of surrounding—and be placed at proper eye level for a full visual impact. The basket must be worthy of accent placement to reflect the aesthetic effect intended.

Select Attractive Containers

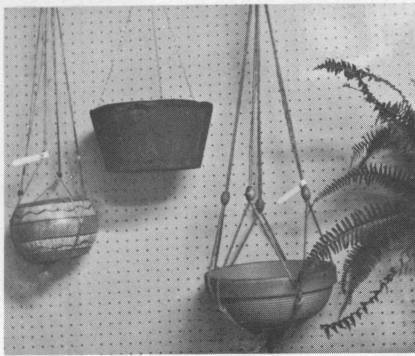
Many types of containers may be used for suspended baskets. Selection is limited only by the grower's imagination. Those made from galvanized wire or of plastic are among the more popular types. Both are usually light and sturdy, making them easy to hang and weather resistant. Pottery types are heavier and, if porous, tend to dry out quickly. Wire-type containers may last longer than plastic, since plastic sometimes tears or splits with weather. Plastic holders, however, do not dry out as quickly as the open-wire models and offer a wide choice of color. Some plastic containers have drain trays attached to the bottom of the container to catch drip or excessive drainage.

This small extra is advantageous near walkways, balconies, windows and glass doors, where excessive splash or drip would be undesirable. However, since these cannot possibly catch all the moisture from watering, they serve only to an advantage in collecting the secondary drip after an adequate watering. Inner liners are also available for open-wire baskets to help catch excessive drainage.

Since the plants should be the key accents, the grower should avoid overly ornate baskets or containers. The gardener must also be careful



Plastic hanging baskets — durable and colorful.



Pottery and wooden hanging baskets — use decorative containers imaginatively.

to suspend the basket so that it functions at the proper eye level to complement out-of-door conditions and surroundings. Where long chains are necessary to suspend baskets, they should be strong but small enough not to dominate the plants.

The container chosen will also determine the type of plant to be grown in it. Color coordination between container and plant is important. For example, colors of many Rex begonias blend beautifully with pottery or wood tones. The white and green foliage of spider plant or other variegated varieties can be highlighted in a white or pale green plastic basket.

Some plants will demand a definite type of basket. For example, many fleshy-stemmed begonias which are often damaged by excessive watering tend to do best in pottery which dries out more quickly. On the other hand, the thirstier plants

such as Wandering Jew, ferns and English ivy like plastic containers which prevent the soil from drying so rapidly. The gardener's methods and timing on watering will help to determine the proper basket choice. If one takes care in watering routinely, pottery or wire which dries rapidly would be safe to use. But for the casual gardener, plastic or non-porous containers are helpful.

Containers for hanging plants come in all sizes and colors. Some of the more common ones are of wood, ceramic, terra cotta or asbestos. Novelty containers continue to be popular, with egg baskets and army helmets often being used for a favorite fern or ivy. In adapting items as containers, the gardener should remember that an open drainage is essential for all containers.

Construct Baskets Properly

The best time to plant hanging baskets is in the early spring after the danger of cold is past and when plants are readily available. A spring planting allows for a long growing season and gives the gardener enough time to enjoy a seasonal planting. Since hanging basket plants must be protected from chilling cold, they are not practical as accents for a winter landscape.

For a wire or other open type of container, the gardener should use a liner material to keep the soil from spilling from the container. Usually a 2-inch layer of moistened

sphagnum moss is pressed firmly against the bottom and sides of the container to make a nest for the heart of soil. To make dry sphagnum moss easier to handle, the gardener can put it first in a tub of water and then squeeze the moss free of excessive moisture before lining the basket. Basket liners are also available for open baskets, and plastic film is sometimes used. When these materials are used to line the basket, the grower must punch holes in the bottom to insure drainage. (See Step A.)

The grower should use good potting soil to fill the heart of the basket. A good soil for most plants is composed of one part sharp builder's sand, two parts loamy soil and one part leafmold or peat moss. The gardener may wish to use his own soil mixture or organic material or purchase one of the many already prepared potting soils. (See Step B.)

The soil should be recessed approximately 2 inches below the top edge of the container to allow for watering. This 2-inch area will allow room for water to stand as it slowly moves into the soil for thorough watering. The grower should firm the selected plants into the soil at their normal growing depth—neither too deep nor too shallow—and then thoroughly water the planted basket. (See Step C.)

Use Interesting Plants

Plants with a hanging or trailing form are usually effective for basket

Steps in Constructing a Hanging Basket



Lining the basket (Step A).

Filling the basket with potting soil (Step B).



Placing and firming the plant into the basket (Step C).

Hanging the completed basket (Step D).



planting. However, almost any plant that strikes a gardener's fancy may be grown in hanging containers. Plants tend to do exciting things when they are suspended in the air at or above normal eye level. Fully developed hanging plants will usually camouflage or hide the container, allowing the plant, rather than the container, to be the outstanding garden feature. For this reason, one should make the container selection with the fully developed plant in mind. (See Step D.)

Hanging baskets, if exposed to dry winds and air, dry out rapidly. They are, therefore, used best in protected, shady areas and call for shade-loving plants. Hanging baskets also must be protected from hot summer sun. The amount of care one can offer the baskets should generally influence the selection of plants used. Even though hanging baskets tend to require a lot of maintenance, the proper selection of low-maintenance plants can certainly reduce the amount of care necessary.

Seasonal baskets come alive with colorful annuals such as the popular cascade petunias, vinca or periwinkle, portulaca, impatiens, thunbergia or johnnie jump-ups. These annuals tend to take more care (watering, feeding and pinching back) than more permanent plants, yet are more economical to buy, are faster

growing for quick effects and provide a rich color accent. Most annuals will need a filtered sun for good bloom.

Some handy ornamental plants commonly planted in Texas home landscapes are also adaptable to basket culture. Hardy and tolerant to cold weather, they are easily carried over from year to year. Some of those which seem common and conventional at ground level become outstanding specimens when airborne. Weights may be placed on flexible branches to cause them to hang or weep downward to develop a new plant form. Fishing leads or clothespins also may restrain or reshape until the plant forms its new growth habit. Hardy but adaptable plants include such varieties as dwarf sasanqua, holly fern, spreading or creeping junipers, dwarf gardenia, dwarf abelia and common mint.

Numerous plants of the foliage or "houseplant" type are suitable for hanging baskets. Some are vining types sporting fast growth and outstanding foliage, while some will offer blooms as well as foliage. Like houseplants, however, they must be kept indoors or in a protected area during cold snaps and the winter season.

In the list below are some varieties commonly used for basket planting. The list is by no means

inclusive. The effectiveness of individual plants will, of course, vary from one part of Texas to another.

Tips for Hanging Basket Care — Keys to Success

- Because baskets dry out so rapidly, watering is the major maintenance concern. Perhaps the best and most convenient method of watering is to lower the basket to



Complete immersion of basket in tub of water, allowing for saturation of entire basket.

FOLIAGE TYPES

Ajuga

Asparagus fern — (*A. plumosa* and *A. sprengeri*) will tolerate filtered sun and mild cold

English ivy — many varieties

Ferns — native and exotic species

Kangaroo vine or Swedish ivy — (*Plectranthus australis*)

Philodendron (vining types)

Pothos

Spider plant or Airplant — (*Chlorophytum comosum* 'Vittatum')

Grape ivy — (*Cissus rhombifolia*)

Wandering Jew — (*Tradescantia*) many colors and varieties

Candle plant — (*Plectranthus coleoides marginatus*)

German ivy — (*Senecio mikanooides*)

Plants For Hanging Baskets

Strawberry geranium — (*Saxifraga sarmentosa*)

Variegated vinca, periwinkle — (*Vinca major variegata*)

Baby's tears — (*Helxine soleirolii*)

Creeping Charlie — (*Pilea nummulariifolia*)

Artillery plant — (*Pilea microphylla*)

Burro tail — (*Sedum morganianum* and others)

Hoya or wax plant — (*Hoya*)

Teddybear — (*Episcia lilacina* 'Lilacina')

FLOWERING TYPES

Allamanda

Achimenes

Begonias

Climbing geranium

Browallia

Cascade chrysanthemum

Cascade petunia

Clianthus

Campanula

Flame violets — (*Episcias*)

Fuchsias

Impatiens

Trailing lantana

Lipstick plant — (*Trichosporum*)

Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter cactus

Royal red bugler — (*Aeschynanthus pulcher*)

Episcia

Carrion flower — (*Stapelia nobilis*)

Bougainvillea

Shrimp plant — (*Beloperone guttata*)

the ground and then immerse it in a tub of water, allowing the water to saturate the basket. Once the soil is saturated, the basket can be removed and allowed to drain. Then the container can be rehung.

- For fully developed or cascading plants, this method of watering can damage the plant if growth extends below the bottom of the basket or if plants are very brittle. The only alternative is to hand water with a slow stream of water, allowing the water to penetrate gradually.
- Both the type of plant and container and the exposure will determine how often a hanging basket plant will require watering. In summer, baskets dry out quickly and will demand watering every other day, if not daily. If the gardener is out of town, baskets may be placed in a cool, shaded garden bed or wrapped with plastic or moist paper to prevent excessive drying.
- The gardener can feed baskets best along with the watering process. The excessive amounts of watering tend to quickly wash plant

nutrients out of the soil. These must be replaced at regular intervals. During the growing season, most plants should be fed every two to four weeks. Water-soluble or liquid fertilizers, which are the best, are not desirable until plants are well established and growing. Too rapid fertilization may burn and injure the growing plants. Directions for amounts of liquid feeding should be followed carefully since excessive amounts also will injure the plant. During the winter, it is desirable that the plant harden off and slow down its growth rate; therefore, feeding and watering will be less frequent. Feeding once a month should be adequate for most plants during dormant seasons.

- Plants which are to be carried over winter must be protected from cold or freezing. A heated greenhouse, garage, enclosed porch or indoor area which offers adequate light can serve for protection during cold periods. Most hanging baskets should remain outdoors when the temperature is 45 degrees F. or more. Below 40 degrees F., damage in the way of

easiest to use along with the watering process, tend to give the best results. A complete and balanced formula is recommended for general use.

- For newly planted baskets, feed-leaf drop and poor growth may occur, and, of course, freezing temperatures will kill tender plants.
- If hanging baskets cannot be protected over winter, a grower should choose more hardy ornamentals, such as English ivy, Asiatic jasmine, vinca or junipers.

Enjoy Hanging Baskets

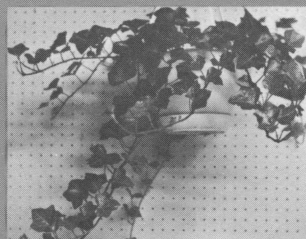
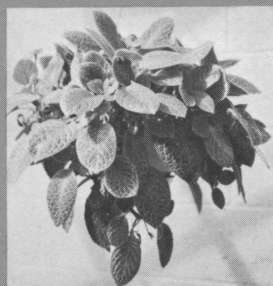
Pleasure in and success with hanging baskets have stimulated many growers to build small greenhouses. But the average home gardener does not have to have elaborate equipment or long years of horticultural training to get enjoyment from making attractive hanging arrangements. Good planning for locations and effective choices of containers and plants plus reasonable care will result in months or years of pleasure from this unusually attractive, versatile form of home landscape design.



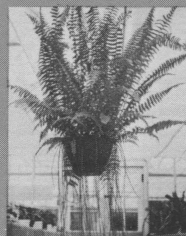
Wax plant (*Chlorophytum comosum* 'Vittata').

English ivy (*Hedera helix*).

Teddybear (*Episcia lilacina* 'Lilacina').



Begonia.



Boston or sword fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*).



Wandering Jew (*Zebrina pendula discolor*).

Wax plant (*Hoya lacunosa*).



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