

All about hanging baskets

HANGING BASKETS HAVE BEEN HANGING AROUND FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. They were popular in ancient Rome, and today they provide instant color in the spring for porches, patios and decks. One of the reasons they are so popular in our climate is that you can easily bring them inside when there is a threat of frost. There are many types of hanging baskets to choose from ? plastic, wood, wire, half baskets to mount on a wall, compressed fiber and even plastic pouches. You can line them with everything from garden soil to sphagnum peat moss or shredded coconut fiber.

There are some important things to consider when you build or buy a hanging basket. Where you will be hanging it? Wire baskets lined with moss will leak some every time they are watered. Will you be hanging it where leaking water won't be a problem? Some plastic hangers come with a saucer attached to the bottom that allows for drainage but will hold some water. The fiber baskets don't stand up very well if they are hung out in the rain or where they are constantly wet. Half baskets or pouches mounted on a wall can leave water stains.

Size is important too. The smaller the basket the more often it will have to be watered especially if it's hanging where it can get full sun all day. Keep in mind that a large basket filled with mature plants and soil will be very heavy when it's wet so take care that where you hang it will support the weight. Also keep in mind the size and strength of the person who will be moving the basket around. A soil-less mix will be lighter than potting soil.

Once you've got your basket, what to put in it? Use your imagination and creativity, and don't limit yourself to flowers. There are almost no limits ? although corn is probably not a good idea! A large basket with a combination of lettuce, cherry tomatoes, herbs and a few edible pansies will look great and you can get a salad or two out of it over the summer. Just one patio tomato plant will fill a 12-inch basket to overflowing and produce great tasting tomatoes all summer and into the fall if you protect them from the cold. Or you could try a herb assortment ? chives, sage, parsley, basil and rosemary, for example. Nothing beats cooking with fresh herbs harvested as needed from a hanging basket just outside the kitchen window. And they will last well into the winter hanging inside after the first frost.