



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

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Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative
Extension Service

SCFCL WEBSITE: <http://clemson.edu/fyd/fcl.htm>

Leader Training Guide

“Begonias in the Birdbath” A Creative Guide to Unusual Containers

Objective:

To discover unusual containers for growing flowers, herbs and vegetables.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

Many “found” objects can be used for growing container plants. Express your personal style, humor and creativity by using items other than conventional pots or window boxes.

Lesson:

If you live in an apartment, townhouse or condo with only a balcony or patio to grow plants on, you're probably already familiar with container gardening. But even those of you with a traditional garden, will find container gardening to have many advantages. First of all, every gardening task is simpler in a small space – no tilling, shoveling or hoeing. Second, containers are mobile – you can move them whenever or wherever you please. Third, container gardens almost never have weeds! And last, well placed, striking containers often have a greater visual impact in the garden than a bed of flowers or foliage plants. And besides all that, new technologies have introduced potting soils that contain slow release fertilizers and surfactants and polymers that hold moisture, reducing the need for frequent watering and feeding.

Now that you know how easy it is to grow container gardens, have fun with the containers you use. Innovative, creative gardeners can convert all sorts of items into containers for plants. Some considerations for choosing containers are, drainage holes (Can they be added?), the size of the plants being used (Make sure the container is large enough), and for gardeners in zones 7, 8, 9 avoid using clear or very dark colored containers which absorb more heat and can “cook” roots. Very large containers can become too heavy to move when filled with soil and plants. Containers can be partially filled with crumpled plastic bags or Styrofoam peanuts before soil is added to cut down on weight. However, tall containers may need to be stabilized with sand or rocks in the bottom to keep it from being blown over in high winds.

Keep your eyes open when shopping in stores other than usual garden centers – they may be treasure troves for containers. Building salvage stores offer sections of chimney flue tiles, terra cotta drainage tiles, concrete culverts, sinks, bathtubs and concrete blocks.

Thrift shops and yard sales might yield decorative bowls, soup tureens, old pots and crockery, pitchers, spatterware washbasins, all types and sizes of baskets and plastic tote bags. Dollar stores have colorful plastic tubs, buckets and bowls.

Look in your own house, attic, garage or yard for some of the best containers. Added bonus – they're free!

Old wheelbarrows or garden carts are great for large plants or collections of plants. Watering cans, bird baths and old fountains that may have cracked or sprung leaks make beautiful containers for flowers and vines. Old fish tanks and bowls are wonderful for terrariums. Birdhouses and mailboxes that have seen better days can be recycled into containers for smaller plants.

Old rubber boots or wooden shoes, toolboxes or tackle boxes, canoes or kayaks make a humorous statement when filled with bedding plants. Have an old bicycle with a basket? Fill the basket with plants, attach another basket to the seat and hang planters from the wheels and handlebars. For a child's garden, use old, large toys like dumptrucks, a child's wheelbarrow, a wagon or wooden toy box to hold colorful flowers or even vegetables that kids will enjoy growing.

Found objects from nature are beautiful containers, really more like pieces of art. Large pieces of driftwood with hollowed out spaces, old stumps, gourds and joints of giant bamboo are striking planted with succulents or annuals.

Produce market baskets in varying sizes can be filled with sawdust or potting soil, just line with a large plastic bag or burlap before filling. Containers with sawdust must be fertilized regularly with liquid fertilizer. Hay bales can be used in the same way. Just make a planting hole, fill with flowers or vegetables and feed each time you water.

To make a miniature kitchen garden of herbs and vegetables, drill drainage holes in a large wooden salad bowl and plant with salad greens. Add an old wire three tier hanging produce basket. Line the baskets with sphagnum moss and plant with herbs and cucumbers. A large metal colander lined with moss can hold bush type cherry tomatoes or radishes.

Old galvanized wash tubs and buckets are great for vegetables or flowers needing more room for roots. Water gardens with colorful blooms and foliage can find a home in old clawfoot bathtubs or horse troughs.

Old chairs, tables, benches or stools can be charming when you cut out a hole in them to fit an overflowing pot of annuals or perennials.

If you're crafty and would like to make your own containers, fake stone sinks or hypertufa containers may be for you. Made of one part sand, one part Portland cement and two parts sphagnum peat moss moistened with water to the texture of peanut butter. It can be molded into different shapes. Boxes, pots, bowls or tubs can be used as molds. Pour some of the compound mixture in the bottom of the container, then sit a smaller container into the first and fill in the cavity

between the two with more of the mixture. After 3 or 4 hours remove the inner container and tap out the compound container. Let dry until solid and drill drainage holes and plant.

Lesson Summary:

Planting containers are limited only by your imagination. Look everywhere for unusual objects that can hold potting mix and plants. Show your personality and style with found objects d'art.

Suggested Activities:

Look through your house for unusual containers – shop yard sales, thrift stores and antique shops for everything from china to wine barrels – you never know where you will find the perfect container!

Suggested Materials:

Start small – find an old galvanized tub or bucket, drill drainage holes, add potting mix and plant with mixed petunias. Line an old basket with moss, plant with herbs for a window kitchen garden.

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