

Lewiston, Maine
April 18, 2003

Window Box Hints

Window Boxes:

Pocket size gardens in unexpected places

A simple and colorful way to add a touch of charm and a hint of your personality is planting window boxes or container gardens. These compact planting send a signal of warm welcome as well as bring a touch of Europe to your surroundings. Your designs can be bold, whimsical, flamboyant or a creation of old-world grace.

The first planning steps involve determining the type of box to use. Window boxes come in many materials. Traditional wooden boxes are made from cedar and cypress to withstand wet weather. Pine can be used, but waterproofing is necessary for a longer life. Many mail order garden suppliers offer sturdy fiberglass boxes as well as those made from cast aluminum. Heavy duty planters known as English hayracks add a quaint look. Plastic containers provide lightweight mobility. If there are no drainage holes, you'll need to drill several.

The size of the box is next to decide and should be determined by where you want to place it. Setting them on platforms or flat surfaces won't need hanging hardware. But if you're hanging it under windows without shutters, they should not be shorter than the width of the window. They should measure the same size as the window width or wider. For windows with shutters, it's recommended to measure from the middle point of your left shutter to the middle of your right shutter to look visually balanced. Supporting the weight of your window box is also very important. Be sure to select secure solid steel brackets, screws or anchors for attaching them to your houses, or use strong wire for deck railings and fences.

Use a highly quality peat-base soil mix. Regular potting soils are too light to sustain the plants. An easy soil recipe for containers is one part topsoil, one part peat moss, one part bark chips and a small amount of potting soil that contains vermiculite and perlite. Water-retentive crystals aid in holding moisture, while minimizing watering. To keep soil from escaping through drain holes, an inch or two of gravel or some type drainage material should be placed in the bottom first.

Taller flowers are planted in the back of the box, short ones in the front and mounding plants in the center. If you want that cascading or waterfall effect, use ivies or other

trailing plants such as Vinca Vine or Sweet Potato Vine in the front. Other planting suggestions include: crowding the plants for a showy look – plant closer than you would in the garden. Experimenting with color schemes and using unusual textures or shapes to please the eye.

Maintenance of your box is simple – water, pinch off spent blooms, fertilize every two weeks and water by touch – not sight. Window box soils tend to dry quickly, but over watering can cause rot. Test the soil first with your finger and only water if it's dry.

Then it's time to enjoy! You'll find that you, and others, will pause to savor the simple beauty spilling from your window box creations. Your home's entryway will enlighten the senses of you and your guests.

Information by Flower Framers by Jay, Cincinnati, Ohio. For more information, visit www.flowerframers.com, or write: 671 Wilmer Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45226, Toll free 1-800-315-1805.