

Window Box Gardening
Diann Blake
Angelina Master Gardener

Window box gardening is an inexpensive but rewarding way to add appeal and color to your home or apartment. You don't need a large amount of space and after placing and planting there is little care other than watering.

First, select the container. Terracotta, cedar, redwood or plastic are all available to purchase. You may choose to build your own window box. Be sure to use wolmanized pine, cedar, redwood or other decay resistant lumber. Drainage holes are a must. You may also want to use liners for your boxes. Regardless of the type of container choose one that extends the full width of your window.

Place the window box so the top of the box is just below the windowsill. Place a 1 x 2 inch board between the box and the house to protect the house from water damage. Anchor the window box to the house using wood screws drilled from the back of the box through to the studs. You can also attach heavy shelf brackets to the house and set the window box on the brackets, making it easy to clean and change out the flowers.

Before selecting the flowers decide if the box will be in the sun or shade. This will determine the type of flowers you choose. The flowers you select should have similar lighting and watering requirements. For instance don't plant sun-loving zinnias with impatiens that thrive in the shade. Plant all, upright plants in the back, mounding plants in the middle, and trailing plants in the front. Stagger plant rows so they won't be in a straight line.

Try planting a seasonal box with some flowering and some foliage plants. An herb box or a variety of salad greens is another possibility. Stick to one basic color or use

several hues of one color. You may choose a theme, such as a patriotic red white and blue. For fall, plant shades of yellow and orange.

Use plenty of plants for an attractive appearance. Fill the box with a peat-based potting mix. Don't set the plants deeper than they are in the nursery container. Firm the soil around each plant and water thoroughly.

Start the spring with spring flowering bulbs, cyclamen, pansies, snapdragons, or ivy. For summer select long blooming annuals, perennials and ivy. Some plants for a sunny location are alyssum, calendula, petunia, phlox, salvia, verbena, marigold, zinnia, miniature roses, candytuft, fan flower, vinca and lantana. For a shade box you may choose fern, begonia, coleus, hosta, impatiens, and caladium. In the fall you might plant chrysanthemum, ivy, pansy, snapdragons, or vinca. For winter, cyclamen, dianthus, dusty miller, ornamental cabbage or kale, English ivy, juniper or pansy is good choices. Plant whatever appeals to you!

Window boxes are almost trouble free. Water when the soil feels dry one inch below the surface. This may mean watering two or three times a day during the summer months. Try watering in the early morning. Use a liquid fertilizer every ten days. Pull up all withered plants and replace them with new plants in the box. The withered plants may be replanted in your yard. Deadhead all the flowers to keep them blooming longer.

Window box gardening can be very enjoyable and you can reap great rewards for a small amount of labor. If this sounds like your "cup of tea" give it a try this year.