

Container Plants

Growing plants in containers can be both challenging and rewarding. There are many native plants which can be successfully grown in pots. Experiment with your plant selection and enjoy the challenge of growing something different.

What are the advantages of growing plants in containers?

There are many beautiful native plants we would love to have growing, but our gardens may not provide the conditions for the particular plant of our choice. In a container, the right aspect, the right type of soil and the right drainage conditions will make it possible for the plant to flourish.

Garden spaces are becoming smaller. For some of us, there is no garden space. If you live in a flat or unit, the only way to grow any plant is in a container.

Attractive pot plants can be used to enhance any verandah, courtyard or be used indoors. Pot plants can be 'portable gardens'. They can be moved from place to place to suit the occasion or importantly, moved with you when you move house.

Native plant species are being endangered as their habitats are destroyed. Their conservation may depend on people maintaining them in garden situations. Growing plants successfully in containers may be a valuable contribution to this cause.

Are plants easy to grow in containers?

A garden plant may survive with lack of attention but a plant grown in a container needs continuing care to provide the right amounts of food, light and moisture to ensure its survival.

What plants should I grow?

Choose the right plant to suit the position you want to place the pot, remembering that growth, size and the requirements of the plant will be important. A plant which requires warmth and light will not flourish in a cool, shady corner.

What type of container?

There are many containers both decorative and functional from which to choose. Choose containers to suit the plant and the position.

Any container should be slightly larger than the plant and in proportion to its size. It must have good and adequate drainage holes. Plastic pots which are light to handle can be placed within elaborate decorative pots and can be easily moved.

Hanging baskets, logs, large tubs, window boxes or terracotta pipes can also be used. Water-well pots take a lot of the pain out of watering, and are particularly suitable for moisture loving plants and for hairy-leafed plants which may rot with direct watering. The choice is yours.

What type of potting mix?

Ordinary garden soil is not recommended for plants in containers. A good commercial potting mix, preferably one which carries the Australian Standard should be used. These mixtures ensure good drainage and contain all the elements which encourage good plant growth.

What type of fertiliser?

Native plants grow best with the use of fertilisers especially formulated for Australian plants. A slow release fertiliser for native plants is readily available.

Some guidelines for growing Australian plants in containers

- Water with care as it is easy to either over-water or to allow a container plant to dry out.
- If a plant has become very dry, soak the plant in a bucket of water until the bubbles stop rising.
- Fertilise regularly and according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Tip prune constantly to maintain shape and compactness of the plant. Rotate for even growth.
- Check for pests and diseases. If used indoors, regularly move the plant to a protected position outside for a 'period of rest'.

Some suggestions for Australian plants suitable for containers

Large Containers

Plum Pine, *Podocarpus elatus*: A coastal rainforest tree which grows on the Central Coast. It is slow growing and makes a very good indoor plant when small. Can be maintained for some years as a container plant. Attractive light green foliage and shape. Suit medium to bright light.

Black Apple, *Planchonella australis*: A rainforest tree found growing on the Central Coast. A slow growing plant, makes a good indoor plant when small and is able to be maintained for several years as a container plant. Shiny leathery leaves.

Syzygium francisii and *Syzygium luehmannii*: Two attractive plants of the Lillypilly family. Good indoor plants when small, slow growing, compact shape, very colourful new foliage.

Davidson's Plum, *Davidsonia pruriens*: Large leaves with pink new growth - a very good indoor plant. A rainforest tree but can remain in a container for some years.

Black Bean, *Castanospermum australe*: Shiny dark green leaves makes this an attractive indoor foliage plant.

Hanging baskets

Hoya australis: Twining climber, fleshy new leaves, scented white flowers. Does well also as an indoor plant if given a climbing frame.

Hare's Foot Fern, *Davallia pyxidata*: Locally growing fern. Easy to grow, makes a most attractive hanging basket as its rhizomes and long glossy fronds completely hide the basket.

Native Pepper Vine, *Piper novae-hollandiae*: Strong climber which does well in a hanging basket, but can also be an indoor plant if given a climbing frame. Heart-shaped glossy leaves.

Brachyscome multifida: Flowers vary in colour, white, pink, mauve, blue daisy. Successful as a hanging basket.

Lobelia trigonocaulis: This plant can also be grown in a shallow pot. Heart-shaped leaves. trailing habit, pale blue flowers.

Fairy Fan Flower, *Scaevola aemula*: A very attractive plant that will cascade over the edge of the basket. Produces many mauve-blue flowers in spring and summer.

Small to medium size containers

Thyme Honey Myrtle, *Melaleuca thymifolia*: Fine narrow leaves, fringed flowers, shades of pink and white.

'Paper Baby' *Helipterum anthemoides*: White paper daisy flower.

'Pink Crystals' *Zieria*: Attractive pink flowers, small leaves.

Red lechenaultia, *Lechenaultia formosa*: Fleshy leaves, showy flowers of various colours, rose, scarlet, yellow.

Crowea exalata: Rounded shrub, bright pink star flowers.

Native Fuchsia, *Epacris longiflora*: Gosford Shire emblem. Straggly plant, but most attractive red tubular flowers with white tips. Can be difficult to grow but worth a try.

Native Violet, *Viola hederacea* and *Viola betonicifolia*: Two native violet species. Low growing, make attractive squat pot plants. Also suitable for hanging baskets.

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