Water Gardening in Containers

Water gardening in containers is an excellent alternative to in-ground pools if space or physical constraints are limiting. Just as container vegetable gardening offers individuals with limited space opportunity to enjoy gardening, water gardening in containers offers an opportunity for individuals with limited space to enjoy the complex interactions of aquatic gardening.

Water gardens in containers are micro-habitats, but still very complex systems. Due to the size limitations, there is little room for error when water gardening in containers.

Containers can vary from plastic to concrete to ceramic to wooden barrels lined with plastic liners. Anything that holds water and does not have a toxic lining can be used. After locating a suitable container, fill with 6 inches of good loam soil.

Any of the plants used in water gardening in pools or ponds can be utilized in the container. However, the size of the plant needs to be fitted to the size of the containers. Extremely large or tall plants can cause containers to tip over if the containers are too small. The number of plants in container water gardening is generally reduced.

Submerged plants and rooted floating aquatic plants such as water lilies, watershield and lotus are particularly attractive in container plantings. Keep shallow-water or bog plants to a minimum and use only as specimen plants.

Since most containers are easily movable, tropical plants can be utilized in cooler climates and brought into the home during winter months.

Since containers are so small, the addition of fish may be difficult. If fish are utilized it is recommended that the number be kept to a minimum so that excess nutrients do not build up. The fish do not feed on plants themselves, and low oxygen does cause fishkills, so aeration may be needed if fish are stocked heavily.

Prepared by Jack M. Whetstone, Extension Aquatic Specialist, and D. Lamar Robinette, Extension Aquatic Specialist, Clemson University. (New 05/99.)