Tips for Hanging Baskets

Hanging baskets are the “cherry on top” of nearly any landscape, suspending nature in the spaces above porches, patios, and pergolas and effectively drawing the eye upward. They can be as simple as Boston ferns on a shady front porch or richly colorful creations adorning streetscapes or lampposts.

Street light hanging baskets with begonias, trailing petunias, and lantana.
Joey Williamson, ©2016 HGIC, Clemson Extension

These floating floral orbs are easy to create, but do require a bit of know-how in order to keep them maintained. Once gardeners strike the balance of meeting the light, water, and space requirements of the plants chosen for the container, the only limitation is creativity.

Wire, wood, and plastic are some of the materials commonly used for hanging baskets. Commercially available wooden baskets are often small square boxes intended for epiphytic plants, such as orchids or staghorn ferns. These plants do not need a lot of soil in which to grow since they obtain moisture and nutrients from their environment.

Plastic hanging baskets tend have a low soil volume to plant size ratio. In the greenhouse or nursery where they are grown, these baskets likely receive frequent short bursts of irrigation. The same plant hanging on a sunny porch will dry out quickly unless the gardener is committed to the same watering schedule. Alternatively, gardeners may choose to repot into larger containers with more soil, which will need less frequent watering. Plastic hanging baskets with ample soil volume do not dry out as quickly as other types of baskets made from porous materials, and are becoming increasingly more popular.

Wire baskets are more time consuming to create, but the end results are attractive and with a few extra steps, will require less water to maintain. One trick which will increase water holding capacity is to begin with a layer of pre-made coir, or coco fiber, followed with a piece of black plastic. You will need to poke holes in the plastic prior to filling it with soil to ensure good drainage.

A wire basket planter lined with sphagnum moss.
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Moistened sphagnum moss can also be used to line hanging baskets. For step-by-step instructions on creating a moss-lined basket, go to Clemson’s Home & Garden Information Center Factsheet HGIC 1154 Hanging Baskets & Window Boxes.

Hanging baskets can become heavy when filled with wet soil. Soilless peat-based potting mix is recommended because it is well-drained, lightweight, and retains moisture and nutrients. Unfortunately, if allowed to dry out completely, this product is very difficult to re-wet. To avoid this problem, mix potting soil with ¼ volume of good quality compost or commercially available bagged “garden soil”.

Automatic irrigation systems are available as kits at home improvement stores and landscape supply retailers and help minimize the time and energy required to irrigate. With the aid of a manual timer, gardeners can water their hanging baskets without dragging a hose around or getting wet. If you enjoy watering, but cannot reach your pots, plant pulleys are available to raise and lower plants without the strain of hoisting heavy plants.

For best results, hanging baskets should be fertilized throughout the growing season. While most growing media contains slow-release fertilizer, frequent watering and crowded growing conditions make regular fertilizing necessary. The Clemson University Home & Garden Information Center recommends fertilizing hanging baskets every two weeks with a complete, water-soluble fertilizer mixed at half strength.

Don't forget to mulch your hanging baskets! Covering the soil with bark, pebbles, or moss in hanging baskets reduces evaporation and moderates soil temperatures, as well as giving the pots a finished look.

It is a lot of fun to plan and plant your creations. Choose plants with similar light and water requirements. Start with small, healthy plants to create stunning combination baskets or pick larger plants for single specimen showstoppers. Consider “under planting” baskets by cutting slits in the basket liner and planting trailing, or creeping plants beneath the basket. Ask your local garden center for help choosing suitable plant material for your site. There are numerous interesting plants available for creating gorgeous hanging baskets. Below are just a few of the many for you to choose from:

**Foliage and Flowering Plant for Full-sun Hanging Baskets:**
- Sweet potato vine (*Ipomoea batatas* ‘Blackie’, ‘Tri Color’ or ‘Margarita’)
- Million bells (*Calibrachoa* *hybrida*)
- Hybrid Petunias (*Petunia* *hybrida*)
- Moss Rose (*Portulaca* *grandiflora*)
- Licorice Plant (*Helichrysum petiolare*)
- Verbena (*Verbena* *hybrida*)
- Sun Coleus (*Solenostemon scutellarioides*)
- Cup Flower (*Nierembergia* *hybrida*)
- Twinspur (*Diascia* *hybrida*)

**Foliage and Flowering Plant for Shade to Partial Shade Hanging Baskets:**
- Caladium (*Caladium* *x hortulanum*)
- Dragon Wing Begonia (*Begonia* *hybrida*)
- Angel Wing Begonia (*Begonia* *hybrida*)
- Coleus (*Solenostemon scutellarioides*)
- Polka Dot Plant (*Hypoestes phyllostachya*)
- Wishbone Flower (*Torenia fournieri*)
- Purple Heart (*Setcreasea pallida*)
- Asparagus Fern (*Asparagus aethiopicus*; synonym: *A. sprengeri*)
- Pothos Vine (*Epipremnum aureum*)
- Spider Plants (* Chlorophytum comosum*)

For more plants to include in hanging basket check out The Clemson University Home and Garden Center Factsheet HGIC 1152 Growing Annuals.


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