

You can use lots of different types of containers to grow plants in cramped city spaces. Pots, bottles, bowls, boxes, even bags of soil or cut off barrels. The best idea is to be sure to have a drainage hole on the bottom or you will have to be on them all the time to monitor for root rot. Plastic retains moisture better than clay. From my experience, the plastic usually heats up more quickly especially if it's a dark color. Consider this if you are putting plants in full sun.

Sizes of your containers can be mixed and matched to create a pleasing array of leaves and colors. Try mixing light lacy plants like ferns or baby's breath with daisies or cosmos for a pretty texture. You can also layer your plants on different levels to obtain interesting layouts. Buy metal plant stands or use wooden boxes to achieve different levels. I use the metal plant stands in the winter to give all my plants a shot at the sunlight in the bay window...

Try growing small plants like cherry tomatoes, strawberries, limes, lemons, chilipeppers or greens and herbs in containers. Make sure to have to proper drainage for these and use the right fertilizer combination for them. Most of these seem to prefer full sun. There is an old Chinese saying - "The best fertilizer in the garden is the gardener's own shadow". I have found that by keeping an eye on things you can stave off infestations by white flies, aphids, etc.. Then you can pick them off or use a simple soap spray to get rid of them before they become a major problem. You can make your own spray and avoid any toxic chemicals. Since we are talking about growing on an apartment balcony, small yard, roof etc. you probably aren't going to have a lot of space to keep up with.

It's best not to use soil from outside for your containers. It may contain bacteria, viruses, mold, insects or weeds. Buy the bags of soil that are the correct type for the plants you are trying to grow. There are basically two types of growing medium. Soil bases or peat based. Soil is heavier and can have organisms that can break down matter into minerals that are essential nutrients for the plant. Peat is lighter and doesn't have this capability so you will have to add food for the plants.

### **Types of Potting Mixes:**

Bromeliad Mix - spongy, porous for shallow root systems

Bulb Fiber - light and drains easily. Good drainage is necessary for bulbs to avoid rot.

Soil based - heavy, retains moisture. May have organisms that break down material into nutrients. Good for foliage based plants.

Charcoal - helps absorb excess minerals. Used to "sweeten" the soil

Peat - usually no nutrients, is light.

Perlite - used for texture, aeration and drainage

Vermiculite - this substance retains water and nutrients

Aggregate - Clay pellets mix. Usually used in potting for water gardens, lillies and other aquatic plants.

Sphagnum Moss - Retains water and air. Commonly used as a growing medium for Phaelenopsis orchids, etc.

TreeBark - holds nutrients and allows air to circulate. Used for dendrobium orchids and plants that like drier roots

Egg and Oyster shells - reduce acidity and help drainage

Limestone - helps drainage and helps control acidity

Sand - added to soil to aid in aeration.

## Tips on Container Gardening

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