



# NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

## Caring for Potted Plants in the Summer Heat (June 29, 2024)

by Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardeners

Mother's Day has come and gone, and many of us were presented with beautiful container plants as gifts. Unfortunately, we now have to keep them alive! Have you found it's a struggle to keep potted plants healthy in our broiling summer heat? You're not alone. We've killed more than our share of plants before learning the ins and outs of container gardening.

First, if you're willing to place the pots in a partly shaded location and water daily, you can probably grow almost anything in a pot on your patio. Here are some tips for successful container gardening in the Central Valley:

- 1) Choose big pots, at least 14 inches across. Small pots are, in most cases, doomed to failure. A large pot provides a greater soil volume, holds more water, and keeps the soil cooler than a small pot. Plastic pots, ceramic, or lightweight terracotta look-alike pots don't dry out as fast as terracotta. Nothing has the beauty of terracotta, however, so that's still a valid choice.
- 2) Plant drought-tolerant plants. You need plants that can dry out and bounce back. Good choices are one-gallon flax, crape myrtle, windmill palms, and citrus. Anything that is described as "drought-tolerant" or "takes the heat" is a good bet. Colorful summer annuals will brighten your patio, and caring for them out of the summer heat allows you to still scratch that gardening itch without the sunburn.
- 3) Choose succulents to substitute for annual color in pots. Plant a broad, shallow pot with a collection of succulents. Try different varieties of jade for height, hen and chicks in shades of green, yellow and pink, and other succulents to drape over the edge. They can be bought in tiny pots and grouped together with a rock or two into an artistic arrangement. Best of all, if you break a piece off and stick it in the ground, it will root and you will have a new plant. One original pot can give birth to several others around the garden.
- 4) Try unusual plants. Water-loving plants such as hydrangeas, abutilons, or ferns do well in pots. Place them under a patio where they'll get afternoon shade. But be prepared to water daily or every other day during July and August. Red fountain grass is a graceful, moveable addition to a patio. Spider plants in a hanging basket will stay contained and their bright green and white stripes will provide a sense of visual relief from the hot summer days. Plants that tend to get too big and fall over in your garden, will be better behaved and easier to contain in a pot. Invasive plants, like oregano, mint, or ivy, are kept in check by planting them in pots.
- 5) Place pots carefully. Make sure they're shaded from the afternoon sun. If possible, run a drip line off a nearby sprinkler, and the pot will be watered when the sprinklers run. Group your pots for the most impact and easiest care.
- 6) Use a good commercial potting mix. Some of the newer mixes are pre-fertilized, or come with polymer crystals, which absorb water and release it slowly to the plant. Don't place gravel in the bottom of the pot. It just adds weight and is not needed for drainage. If your pot has a drainage hole (and it should!), cover it with a small piece of screen, a broken piece of terra cotta pot, or even a paper towel or a coffee filter at the bottom of the pot to keep soil in and bugs out.



Potted plants can add so much to our porches, patios, and gardens. With the proper choice of pots and plants you, too, can have gorgeous healthy container plants that add a whole new element to your landscape.

### The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse North parking lot

### Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

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