Container Gardening

I forgot to water my ferns and my Clemson flag blew off in one of the last bad storms. My front porch looks boring and cookie cutter, just like everyone else’s in the neighborhood. What can I do?

One of the easiest ways to create a welcoming entrance or to spruce up a boring front porch is to add a container planting. Container gardening is an easy, inexpensive, and noncommittal way for people to get a splash of color and drama very quickly. From evergreens to perennials, and everything in between, most any plant can be incorporated into a container garden.

The first step in creating your container garden is to decide where you are going to place it. Will it be in full-sun or full-shade? Will it get water when it rains or will it be up under the eaves? How big should your container be? These are the three main questions to ask yourself before you start. Once you have decided what kind of light the planter will have, the water that is available (either from rain or you watering it), and the size of the planter, it is time to get to work.

Next step is to purchase your container. You want to make sure that the size of the container will not overpower the space you have allotted, but that it will be large enough for the drama you are hoping to achieve. Also, make sure there is a drainage hole at the base of the container. Without drainage, your plants will be more susceptible to root rot diseases. Select a good potting soil to fill your container with. Do not fall for the marketing gimmicks. Read the labels and see what is really inside the bag. You may want to add some large stones in the base of the planter to take up room, aid in drainage, and help keep the container grounded.

Once you have selected your container and you have filled it with potting soil, you are ready to start selecting plants. A great container garden has three main components: a thriller, a spiller, and a filler.

Thriller – A thriller is something tall that gives drama and height to the container. This is usually some type of grass or spike.

Spiller – A spiller is a plant that is low growing and will waterfall over the edge of the pot. Some good examples for this area might be sweet potato vine, bacopa, calibrachoa (million bells), vinca vine, and spreading petunias.
Filler – The filler plant(s) can be anything that gives great color or texture and is usually between 6 and 8 inches in height. Fillers can be just about any annual depending on the light requirements.

One of my favorite part sun/part shade combinations is purple fountain grass (thriller), coleus (filler), and sweet potato vine (spiller). These three plants provide an immense amount of color without a single flower.

If you have a drab entryway that needs a little sprucing up, try container gardening on for size. If you decide tomorrow that you hate it, you can always move it somewhere else, or try some new plants. Send me a photo of your favorite container garden and I will be sure to put it on my twitter and Facebook pages!

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns feel free to contact me, Kerrie Roach, horticultural Extension agent, at North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, by E-mail at Kerrie_Roach@ncsu.edu or call me at 910-671-3276. To learn more about Extension visit North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center’s website at Robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.