



hanging gardens of OPULENCE

Create your own sensational displays, with these practical tips and plant combination ideas from DERYN THORPE



Top tip

Add white flowers or variegated foliage to baskets to provide a highlight that draws the eye.

Australian gardeners lucky enough to see spectacular hanging baskets in Europe often return home excited about creating their own suspended floral extravaganzas. The results can be disappointing, though, as our searing summers and hot winds suck the moisture from the soil and cook the plants.

The solution is to create winter hanging baskets. By planting now, plants grow without the stress of severe heat, and they put on a lavish flower show right through winter and early spring. These are great for space-challenged gardeners, providing an artistic project for those who like to experiment with combinations of foliage and flowers.

Baskets can be suspended from a strong hook on a balcony, pergola or porch, so it hangs at eye level, or you can fix it to a fence. Mine hang on the verandah, in the protected sitting area where we have coffee, so I can appreciate the seasonal colour cascade and keep an eye on watering needs.

It's important to remember these baskets are seasonal, so when the temperature starts to climb, take the baskets down. Put any struggling plants

this goes with that

Here are some winning combinations of plants for hanging baskets.

- **Fuchsia, impatiens, ivy geranium, blue lobelia, fairy primula, alyssum**
- **'Big Red' pelargonium, *Iresine herbstii*, black mondo grass, bidens, Hiemalis begonia, string of hearts**
- **White cyclamen, blue viola, purple pansy, lobelia, maidenhair fern, spider plant**
- **Trailing begonia, red and green leaf bedding begonia, lamium, variegated ivy, alyssum**
- ***Lechenaultia formosa*, fan flower (*Scaevola aemula*), *Brachycome multifida*, *Dampiera diversifolia***
- **Cos lettuce, red and yellow lettuce, parsley, coriander, trailing thyme**



and the potting mix into the compost, and store the empty basket for replanting next year, or replace the plants with heat-tolerant petunias, pelargoniums or succulents.

choosing baskets

There are many different types of baskets, and the least expensive are wire baskets. These need to be filled with coconut (coir) fibre, which is available as a liner or loose material. Alternatives include plastic pots with a water reservoir or drip tray, wall-mounted baskets, and others made from rattan, sisal and fern or terracotta.

Bigger is better, as the basket volume is directly related to the amount of water the hanging garden can retain. Ensure the hook and chains are strong, and consider using specialised basket hooks that allow the basket to be turned with ease.

One drawback with coir fibre liners is they allow air to pass through them, which means the mix dries out more quickly. To reduce moisture loss, I always line them with a piece of plastic, and make a small single drainage hole in the bottom.

"Ensure the chains are strong, and consider using specialised hooks"

Partly fill your baskets with premium potting mix, then position the plants and backfill to about 2cm from the top so the water has somewhere to pool before soaking into the mix.

Mixes formulated for containers usually contain a wetting agent and water-storage crystals. If you choose to add crystals separately (not for baskets growing edibles), hydrate the crystals before adding them. If added dry, they will expand dramatically and can push the plants out of the basket.

choosing plants

Work out the location of your baskets before selecting plants, as you need to consider their specific requirements for water, sun and shade.

Choose plants for the basket as you would a flowerbed by using a variety of textures, colours and shapes to create an interesting display. ►

RAZZAMATAZZ!

Clockwise from top left

Cell packs of advanced flower seedlings make it easy to create a colourful basket; for balance, aim to include upright plants, fillers and trailing plants; petunias flower year round and some seedling ranges come in perfectly matched colour blends; orange and pink impatiens in similar shades look chic and cohesive. **Previous page** Different types of petunias combine in a riotous display.



how to create a flower ball

Wire baskets can be transformed into a flower ball by planting into the sides of the container. For a 35cm basket, use about 12 trailing plants for the sides. Plant one upright plant in the top, surrounded by four to eight mounding plants and four trailing plants.

Add about 3cm of mix to the lined container and firm down. Cut six evenly spaced horizontal slits in the liner and plastic, just above the mix, about 12cm apart. Wrap the root ball of a trailing plant in a tube of newspaper to protect it, then carefully insert the plant from the inside, removing the paper once the root ball is level with the compost. Plants in punnets such as alyssum, pansy, viola and lobelia are ideal.

Add about 10cm of soil, to just below halfway, and firm the mix. Cut six more slits in between the first cuts, about 15cm apart, and insert more plants, then add some mix, and plant into the top of the basket.

If this is all too fiddly, just plant into the top, as trailing plants eventually spill down over the sides.

Flamboyant European baskets mostly use annuals, but you can use perennials too, planting them into the garden or a pot when the basket is dismantled.

For a mixed 35cm basket, consider one or two upright plants positioned in the centre of the basket, with three to seven filler plants positioned around it and, on the edges, five trailing plants to spill down. The skill is choosing plants that grow to completely fill the basket without overtaking their companions.

My favourites for winter shade or morning sun include fuchsia, impatiens, cyclamen, pansy, viola, begonia, ferns, coleus, spider plant, lobelia, ivy, dampiera, *Primula acaulis*, fairy primula (*Primula malacoides*), polka dot plant, plectranthus, purple tradescantia and cineraria.

If you prefer traditional perennials, hellebore, heuchera, lamium, hosta and silver-leafed brunnera make fantastic accent plants, but they need moving from basket to garden before summer.

For sunny spots, try brachyscome, bacopa, coleus, cascading bidens, *Kalanchoe blossfeldiana*, scaevola, pelargonium (*P. calliope* sold as the 'Big' series have the perfect shape), nemesia, diascia, *Dichondra* 'Silver Falls', string of hearts (*Ceropegia woodii*)

MIX 'N' MATCH
From left Planting into the sides of baskets allows for more interesting displays, such as this creation using red begonia, pink laurentia and trailing lobelia; an example of hanging baskets sometimes found in European streetscapes; a bold combination of double yellow calibrachoa and trailing lobelia.

shape & form

Combining a mix of upright, trailing and filler plants helps to create a balanced display. Try selecting plants from each of these three groups.

5 fillers

- Bedding begonia
- Brachyscome
- Polyanthus
- Primula
- Viola

5 trailers

- Ivy pelargonium
- Spider plant
- Bacopa
- Bidens
- Lobelia

5 uprights

- Pelargonium (*P. calibrachoa*, such as those in the 'Big' series, have the perfect shape)
- Coloured-leaf rhizomatous begonia
- Trailing fuchsia
- Cyclamen
- Hellebore

Top tip

If you prefer a single flower colour, vary the colour's shade to create a more complex display.



"The skill is choosing plants that completely fill the basket"

and alyssum. Great for the tropics and subtropics are calibrachoa and *Euphorbia* 'Diamond Frost'.

Before planting, soak plants in water and liquid seaweed for 20 minutes. After planting, I add a sprinkle of slow-release fertiliser and a layer of compost to act as mulch, then water with liquid seaweed, catching the excess in a bucket.

care & maintenance

Hanging baskets are high maintenance and they usually need watering daily, so it may be worth running dripper lines off the reticulation and fitting these with tiny sprayers. Deadhead regularly to boost flower production, and pinch back growth to encourage bushy plants.

I water my baskets weekly with a compost and fish-based soluble fertiliser. If plants fail to thrive, the most likely problem is non-wetting potting mix; immerse the basket in water containing wetting agent and liquid seaweed for an hour or so. GA

Meet Deryn and watch her make a hanging basket at the Perth Garden Festival, which is on April 27-30 at McCallum Park in Victoria Park, Perth. For tickets and more information, visit perthgardenfestival.com