

# PLANTING A LOW-MAINTENANCE BASKET

Plants grown in hanging baskets make beautiful features, but they can be time-consuming to maintain. Most are compact in size, holding small quantities of compost and water to sustain the plants inside, and open-sided wire baskets that also allow water to drain through rapidly may require watering every day. However, if you want a few baskets, there are some easy ways to reduce the workload.

## BASKET TYPES AND SITES

Baskets made from lightweight materials such as rattan or metal wire are popular, but those with solid sides and a plastic lining will usually offer better insulation and retain moisture for longer. Alternatively, try making a basket from an upcycled colander, old shopping bag, or any durable vessel that offers drainage and is not too heavy to hang up. Avoid tiny baskets, which will dry out very quickly and require lots of care. Remember, too, that a basket hanging in full sun will need watering more frequently than one located in semi-shade.



Transform a shopping bag into a plant basket by lining it with recycled plastic.

## LINING OPTIONS

All plant containers need drainage, and hanging baskets are no exception. If you buy one with a plastic liner, snip a few holes around the sides 2.5cm (1in) from the base to create a shallow reservoir. This will help to retain water and keep the compost moist, while allowing any excess to drain out. Baskets lined with coir will drain automatically since this is a naturally porous material, but they can lose water too quickly, so create a reservoir by lining the base with plastic cut from an old compost bag. Lining all free-draining baskets in this way will reduce their watering needs.



Create a shallow reservoir at the base of a coir-lined basket with an old plastic bag.



To reduce the care needed for baskets, install an automatic watering system.

## WATERING TIPS

The primary task needed to maintain all hanging baskets is watering. Use a fine spray on a hose or a rose head attached to a watering can and target the compost rather than the flowers or leaves. This will ensure that the moisture reaches the roots, where it is needed. Also, look out for lance hoses that enable you to water at or above head-height, or retractable pulley systems that allow you to lower your baskets to water them more easily. If you have a few baskets to irrigate and no time to water them by hand, attach drip hoses connected to an automatic watering system (see pp.130–131).

## COMPOSTS AND MULCHES

When planting a summer basket, choose peat-free multipurpose compost that contains enough nutrients to support your plants for a few weeks. You can then add a slow-release fertilizer pellet to keep them healthy for the rest of the season. Autumn and winter baskets will not need a top-up of fertilizer until spring, since plants grow slowly or not at all during the colder months. Also add a 2cm (3/4in) layer of gravel, aggregates, or fine bark chips over the compost to reduce evaporation and lock in moisture.



Crushed seashells, a waste product from the shellfish industry, make an excellent mulch for hanging baskets.

## CREATING AN EASY-CARE BASKET

**YOU WILL NEED** Large rattan basket • Scissors • Peat-free compost • Hose or watering can • Easy-care ornamental plants or herbs (see pp.92–95 and pp.68–69) • Bracket or wire for hanging

- 1 Snip drainage holes in the plastic liner 2.5cm (1in) from the base of the basket. If your basket has no liner, use an old compost bag to line it (see opposite). Fill the basket to about 5cm (2in) below the rim with compost.
- 2 Water the plants well, then plant them at the same level in the compost as they were in their pots. Fill in around the plants with more compost, making sure that there is a gap of 2.5cm (1in) between the surface and rim of the basket to allow space for watering.
- 3 Press the compost down gently to remove any large air gaps and water well with a hose or watering can.
- 4 Either screw a metal hanging-basket bracket to a wall or fence post, or use sturdy wire wound around a roof beam of a pergola or arch from which to hang your basket. Water the basket twice a week, or three times during a hot summer.



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