



Flowerbox and Planter Guidelines

In a commercial corridor such as Dupont Circle, the profile of your business can be raised with healthy flowers in flowerboxes and planters. To assist with your business's healthy flowers, we have assembled the guidelines below. These guidelines are designed to help you decide how to choose the right plants and containers, as well as understand the commitment that will be required for regular maintenance.

Containers

There is a wide variety of shapes and materials for flowerboxes and planters to choose from. Flowerboxes and planters should be as large as possible to fit in with the scale of the window, railing, or sidewalk. Large pots allow for better root development than small pots that dry out quickly, and are less likely to walk away. Many feel that more visual clutter does a disservice to the aesthetics of our neighborhood sidewalks. Wood planters decay quickly, terracotta is very fragile and plastic will easily crack. We are recommending the use of very simple fiberglass containers in grays or deep earth tones to match your architectural facade. Let the variety of the seasonal plantings provide interest and the planters be a neutral foundation that is common along the street.



Simple fiberglass planters define cafe seating.



Window box with red coleus, purple sweet potato vine, dwarf Boston fern and golden creeping jenny.

Soil

Commercially available potting soil is best for container plants because it is sterile, light, and may contain organic matter, such as peat or vermiculite. Dirt and garden soil are not recommended.

Sunlight

To keep your plants flowering and healthy, at least five hours of direct sunlight will be needed, and most flowering plants will like even more. If you have a shady location by a tree, awning, or northern exposure, choose low-light plants. If your flowerbox or planter has a southern or western exposure, choose plants that love more sunlight. Shade can be accommodated with broad leaved ornamentals such as hosta's, aucuba and English ivy.

Water

Because most flowerboxes and planters are not set in the ground, plants cannot rely on the natural wicking action from the soil. That means that you will have to water every day in the spring, summer, and fall. Be sure your pot has good drainage and water is not pooling at the bottom, which leads to root rot. Sphagnum moss, or double shredded hardwood mulch can be placed on top of the bare soil to help retain water and improve the appearance of the planting. Avoid rocks which will restrict plant growth or colored mulches or plastic mulches which draw too much attention to themselves. If you have a hose outlet adjacent to your planter area there are low cost, small scale, easy to install drip irrigation systems available at your garden center which can assist with regular watering.

Fertilizer

Since potting soil is designed to drain quickly, fertilizer will be washed out of the container as you water. Lighter potting soil mixes will require more frequent fertilizing. A general fertilizer (5-10-5 or 10-15-10) is fine for container plants. And some fertilizers are designed to promote larger and more frequent blooms, so check at your garden center. Generally, feeding your plants every other month is sufficient during the growing season. But follow the manufacturer's instructions so you don't "burn" the roots.

Design

Tall narrow containers will set off your shop front window and entrance and be able to tuck into corners out of foot traffic. Horizontal planters can draw the eye to your retail window display and if grouped into a line, define outdoor seating areas and provide plants at eye level for your seated clientele.



Vertical fiberglass planter with fall planting of purple miscanthus grass, winter kale, purple chrysanthemums, pansies, and string of hearts (Ceropegia woodii).

Plants

Filling the container by planting too much rather than too little will give the flowerbox or container a lush effect to create a sensational display. A rule of thumb is to “thrill, fill and spill”. Below is a selection of time-tested plants for container gardens.

Annual Flowers:

(flower well, but live for one season)

Ageratum
Alyssum
Begonia
Celosia
Coleus
Dianthus
Dusty Miller
Geranium
Impatiens
Lantana
Lobelia
Marigold
Nasturtium
Nicotiana
Petunia
Salvia
Snapdragon
Verbena
Zinnia

Perennial Flowers:

(more expensive, but live for years)

Candytuff
Columbine
Gallardia
Gypsophila
Lupine
Rudbeckia
Sedum
Shasta Daisy
Veronica
Yarrow

Shrubs

Boxwood
Aucuba
Dwarf Alberta Spruce
Hibiscus (summer)
Ficus (summer)

Vines

Passion Flower
Ornamental Sweet Potato

Grasses:

(mix in for interest)

Purple Fountain Grass
Blue Oat Grass
Red Fountain Grass
Japanese Forest Grass

Seasonal Displays

Planters need not be empty trash collectors in the cold months. Pansies, snap dragons, sweet alyssum and decorative kales all will winter through from October and through to May with some cold shrinkage on the coldest days but a big bloom in the spring. Remember you must water your plant containers in the winter as well as summer. Christmas displays can be made of evergreen branches, ivy, aucuba and ornaments. Cut branches have lasting power in the cool damp winter air.

Local Garden Centers

You can do it yourself if you have a green thumb or are willing to learn. Here are some nearby shops that have all the supplies and DC based design build firms that have the design and installation assistance you need to create beautiful planters and flowerboxes.

True Value on 17th

1623 17th Street, NW
Washington DC 20009

Old City Farm & Guild

925 Rhode Island Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20001

Sherman Gardens Design Build

(203) 856-6515
benscottsherman@gmail.com

Johnson's Garden Center

4200 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20016

Ginko Garden Design Build

911 11th Street, SE
Washington DC
20003



Planters frame retail window with low maintenance summer planting of ficus standard and crotons (above) kalanchoe and variegated English ivy (below).



Long low planter underlines shopfront window display with hydrangeas and English ivy.



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