

Gardening with Sharon

The Key to Hanging Basket
& Container Gardening is :

TENDINGing



Take a Good Look

The first step of properly tending your baskets and containers is to assess them carefully and ensure you check all parts of your plants.

Here are things to look for when assessing your plants:

Leaves

- Colour - should be a deep green unless it's supposed to be chartreuse
- Wilting - check that they don't feel limp or wrinkled
- Dried - check that they don't crack or break off when touched
- Spotted - do you see spots where there was none previously?
- Curled - do the edges curl in or have an irregular shape?
- Invert them and look at the undersides - bugs like to hang out under the leaves

Flower health

- Even colour - do the petals all have a similar colour around the whole flower?
- Fading colour - is the flower losing its previous 'oomf'?
- Drying - are the flowers drooping and turning brown?

Ensure There's Enough Moisture

The second step in tending your plants is to water them properly. A well hydrated plant is a lot like a well hydrated human - all systems work better and metabolism can function at its peak. **Check hanging baskets and planted containers daily for moisture.**

How to assess moisture levels in:

Hanging baskets - check their weight, after you have watered a few times, you'll get familiar with how light they feel when they need to be watered. You can check their weight a couple of ways:

- Lift the bottom of the pot
- If they aren't hanging, lift them by the hook

Planted Containers

- Assess pots individually by pressing the entire length of your index finger into the pot.
- If it is dry at the knuckle closest to the end of your finger, it is time to give it a drink of water.





How to water Hanging Baskets

- Most hanging baskets measure 10", 12" and 14" across. For these sized baskets, water them until the water just begins to drip out of the bottom of the pot.

How to water Planted Containers

- For smaller upright containers that measure up to 14" across, water them until water begins to drip out of the bottom of the pot.
- For large containers 16" across or more, give these containers a good drink of water and assess the plants' response and how long the plants stay hydrated.
- A water holding hack for both hanging baskets and upright containers: Add 1-1.5" of mulch on the top of the soil between the plants - it keeps it a little cooler and reduces water evaporation and the frequency of watering.



Nutritional Needs are Met

The third step in tending your plants is to properly nourish the plants. Plants that have their nutritional needs met are stronger and grow more vigorously. Both Hanging Baskets and Containers have a finite amount of soil and there is a lot of metabolism resting on each container of soil.

Fertilize hanging baskets and containers weekly.

- Water soluble fertilizers with even numbers like 20-20-20; or ones with a higher middle number (Phosphorous) like 15-30-15 work well.
- There are other natural and organic fertilizers, like Nature's Source, available at greenhouses and garden centers that work well too.
- For an even more detailed discussion on fertilizer, see my blog called 'How to Understand Fertilizer Labels'

Deadhead and Encourage Growth

The final step to properly tend your plants is plant maintenance! Deadheading is an old term for taking off old flowers, otherwise known as 'deadheads'. Deadheading encourages more flowering because the business of plants is reproduction, and that is by producing seeds so it will continue to make more flowers.

Other hanging basket and container maintenance details:

- Remove dead, yellowed, curling leaves. Tired leaves take energy from the plant in attempts to repair those leaves - if they are removed, the plant can spend its energy on growth and blooming.
- Pinch back straggly growth, literally giving the plants a haircut. You can use scissors if you wish, or just pinch them with your fingers - this will stimulate the plant to branch, and keep the plant stocky and bushy.

