

Plants and Youth: Designing and Building a Hanging Basket¹

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A hanging basket is any container that holds plants and is hung from a support. Plastic hanging baskets filled with plants are commonly sold at most garden centers, but it is easy to construct a unique and attractive basket of your own. The container may be a wooden box, a moss-lined wire basket, a plastic pot, or even a decorative piece of wood. Since a container filled with soil can be quite heavy, use strong wire, chain, rope, or leather to hang the basket.

Pre-mixed potting soils can be purchased or you can prepare a soil mix using 2 parts peat, 1 part builders sand, and 1 part perlite. Almost any type of vining, trailing or cascading plant can be used in a hanging basket. Consider combining 2 or 3 different types of plants together, but make sure they have similar light and moisture requirements. Also, look for plants that won't outgrow the container too quickly, or that can be easily trimmed to keep them in bounds.

Wire or plastic mesh baskets must be lined to hold the soil in the container. Preformed coco-fiber liners are available at retail outlets and are sized to fit a variety of basket sizes. Sphagnum moss (not

sphagnum peat, which is used in potting mixes) can also be used. Soak the sphagnum moss in water for an hour, then line the basket with a 2-inch layer. (Figure 1). (Wear plastic gloves when handling sphagnum moss and avoid breathing the dry dust).

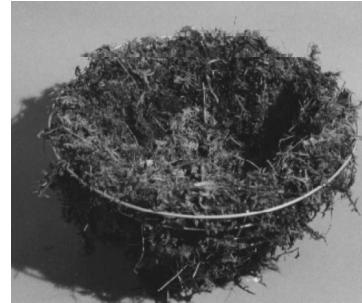


Figure 1. Line a wire or plastic mesh basket with a 2-inch layer of sphagnum moss.

Place a layer of plastic or foil next to the moss before you fill the basket with soil (Figure 2). Punch small holes in the lining so that water can drain out. Next, fill the basket with a potting mix within 1/2 inch of the rim (Figure 3) and plant the desired plant(s) (Figure 4). Water thoroughly after planting and hang the basket in a location that meets the light requirement for the plant(s) used.

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Figure 2. Place a layer of plastic or foil next to the moss before filling the basket with soil.



Figure 3. Fill the basket with a potting mix within 1/2-inch of the rim.



Figure 4. Plant the desired plant.

Water, fertilize and groom the plant(s) as needed to keep them healthy and growing. Hanging baskets may need to be watered every day during warm, dry weather. If flowering plants are used, remove dead blooms and seeds to promote more flowers. Protect cold-tender plants from freezing, winter temperatures by moving them indoors. Most plants eventually outgrow a hanging basket and will need to be repotted into a larger container.

Definition of Terms

Peat - Partly decayed plant material that accumulates wherever water and acidity slows down the process of decay.

Perlite - Very light-weight, porous material that is white in color. It is used in soil mixes to increase drainage and aeration.

Repot - Move a plant from the pot in which it is growing to another pot. This is usually done when a plant has become too large for the original pot.

Sphagnum moss - Partly decayed remains of the sphagnum moss plant. This material has properties similar to a sponge in that it holds water and is spongy to the touch.