

HOW TO... LOOK AFTER YOUR HANGING BASKET



How can you make the most of a small growing space? One way is to think of it as 'cube' – and look at how you can fill the vertical space with plants. Ways to use vertical space include growing climbers (like runner beans), growing ladders and putting shelves on the wall. Another way is to use hanging baskets.

Hanging baskets can also look really pretty. The challenge is that they dry out quickly. So they need watering regularly.

Hanging baskets make good use of vertical space.

Here are some ways you can make watering hanging baskets easier.

Size matters

Choose the largest hanging basket you can find – and that can be secured safely and securely to your home. The larger it is in volume, the less quickly the soil will dry out (and the more food it will hold for your hungry veg).

Line with plastic

Before filling it with compost, line the inside of the basket with plastic – put plenty of holes in the bottom of the plastic for drainage. This will help reduce evaporation from the sides of the basket.

Use a soil mix that retains water

Add something to the compost to help it to retain water. You might add 20 – 40% vermiculite or perlite (these are natural substance made from volcanic rock). Worm compost also retains water well (and it's free if you make it yourself and it's sustainable!).

Cover the top layer of the soil

Put a mulch (mulch is a gardening term for a layer of something on top of the soil) over the top of the hanging basket to slow down evaporation of water from the surface. Plastic (eg from an old compost bag) is good, but you could use wood chip, cardboard or grass clippings.

Use a plastic bottle waterer

Cut off the bottom of an old 1/2 litre plastic bottle and drill a couple of small holes (about 1/8 inch diameter should do) in the lid. Put the bottle, lid facing down, into the compost. When watering, simply fill the cut off end of the bottle with your watering can – and the water will slowly drip out of the holes in the lid.

Choose your crops carefully

Even a large hanging basket will not hold a lot of soil so choose what you grow carefully. Small bush tomatoes designed for hanging baskets (eg cherry cascade) can work well if you have a sunny spot, as do chillies and nasturtiums. In less sunny spots (4 hours a day), I've seen cranberries doing well (and looking great!).



Alternatively, you can grow crops that are happy with less water. There's not a huge choice but herbs like rosemary, sage and thyme are more resilient to drying out occasionally than most.

Feed regularly

Most crops, particularly fruiting crops like tomatoes, will need regular feeding to get a good yield. This is because the small volume of soil in a hanging basket will not hold a lot of food – so you need to add it. Use a liquid tomato feed on fruiting crops. For other crops, try liquid seaweed or worm tea.

Check regularly for watering

Last and most important: check regularly for watering. Do this by putting your finger an inch or two into below the surface of the soil. It should feel damp (like a wrung out flannel) not dry or or soggy. On hot or windy days, hanging baskets may need watering as much as twice a day.