

**GREEN HOUSE****Let the colours of nature cascade**

**Jazz up the empty vertical spaces in your home with the magical touch of hanging baskets**

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Floral display is at its best when it is created in a hanging basket and viewed at an eye level height. A well-balanced and artistically prepared basket always attracts attention no matter where it is hung. Hanging baskets with flowering plants are the sure shot and easy way to add colour and flair to the garden outdoors as well as to complement the decor of a balcony or a terrace garden. These provide an additional design element to pep up the overall look of any area.

As the name suggests hanging baskets are hung in a porch, balcony, staircase, under a tree or at any other unused suitable place. To meet this requirement, plants with trailing cultural habits are preferred because of their ability to display flowers and foliage to the best advantage, covering more floral area than a normal potted plant. Not only this, any shortcoming in the container is also camouflaged by such plants.

There are numerous species of plants which do well in hanging baskets in winter as well summer months. Depending upon an individual's taste there is a wide choice in the selection of flowering plants which can be grouped together to make up a magnificent display. The display can be made of one or more than one species.

A hanging basket is a suspended container firmly secured for growing decorative plants, which can attractively fill empty vertical spaces to add colour. The baskets are made of wire-mesh either galvanised or plastic coated, wood, bamboo, clay, ceramics, terracotta or plastic with drainage holes. These are available in a wide range of colours, style and sizes.

## Choosing a basket

The choice of basket depends upon the choice of plants and its location:

- Wire, wooden or bamboo baskets are not meant for direct planting, but are usually lined with sphagnum moss, coconut fibre or any other suitable material to keep the soil intact. Such baskets are for outdoor use and tend to dry up fast. These thus need more frequent watering. The advantage in this is that planting can be done from the sides as well giving more floral area to add to the beauty of the basket.

- Ceramic and plastic baskets come in different colours and are suitable for both indoors and outdoors while giving contrasting or matching effect to the surroundings. These don't need to be watered very often and can also be "positioned" on a flat surface.



## Tips to beautify

- Pinch growing tips of young plants to encourage bushy growth, giving symmetry and a more pleasing appearance to the basket.
- Old leaves, flowers and seed pods should be removed periodically to get more flowers.
- At no time should the basket be allowed to become dry. Keep the basket moist even if it amounts to watering twice a day for the health of the plants.
- Don't mix shade-loving and sun-loving plants in one basket.
- Hang the basket at a suitable height to allow a full view

The "green thumbs" can also experiment with hanging baskets by planting cacti and succulents in these rather than seasonal flowering plants. These baskets last long as these slow-growing plants can remain in the baskets for years. Once the plants are set, they need very little maintenance and attention. These look best in ceramic or terracotta planters with normal cactus compost. *Zygocactus* (Christmas cactus) with white, pink, purple and red flowers; *Aporocactus flagelliformis* with crimson flowers, epiphytic cacti in different hues; *Chamaecereus sylvestri* with showy red flowers and *sedum morganianum*, are some of the suitable species for such displays.

Summer and winter flowers look best in wire-mesh baskets lined with sphagnum moss. These can also be created in wooden, plastic, ceramics or terracotta planters by placing taller plants at the top and trailing plants around the edge of the basket to give a cascading effect. Pansies, petunias, verbenas and nasturtium in different hues are suitable for winter baskets, where as trailing geraniums and begonias are for summer baskets. Chlorophytum and some ferns also do very well in hanging baskets. Other species may also be tried.

## Short cut

there is shortage of time and you want to create a hanging basket display then the easiest way is to get reasonably sized 4-5 plastic pots with young flowering plants of your choice. Place these plants with the pots in any hanging basket of your choice. However, care should be taken to ensure that the plants are of trailing habit and the basket is aesthetically camouflaged as far as pots are concerned.



If

### **Creating a hanging basket in a wire-mesh planter**

- A suitable sized basket matching with the decor is selected. Its harmony with the plants and their flowers should be ensured.
- A wire-mesh basket should be generously lined halfway up with a 5 cm thick layer of a little bit compressed moist sphagnum moss.
- Fill the basket halfway with moist compost comprising one part coarse sand, one part garden loam and two parts mature dung manure alongwith some NPK fertilizer and bone meal.
- Take out 5-6 trailing young plants of your choice in respect of flower colour and foliage from the pots with their root balls intact and insert each plant gently in the basket at compost level with roots inside the basket and foliage outside. Fill moist compost around the root balls.
- Complete the balance of 5 cm thick sphagnum moss lining around the basket and add moist compost leaving 5 cm from top.
- Take out another lot of 5-6 chosen plants from the pots and place them in a cascading fashion on the sides of the basket.
- At the centre of the basket on top place 3-4 plants, not necessary of trailing habit and further add compost as a finishing touch.
- Gently spray the basket and hang it where it gets some morning or evening sun. After about a week gradually shift the basket to a brighter place for sun-loving plants.

**— The writer is President of the National Cactus and Succulent Society of India**