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# Eye-level hanging baskets add star power to your garden

By Joe Lamp'l

Scripps Howard News Service

**H**anging baskets may be small, but they can really make a garden pop, or add just the right burst of color to an otherwise drab area.

They're easy-to-plant, portable mini-gardens that let you add color and texture anywhere you need it. And when they're dangled near eye-level, they can become the center of attention in any landscape scene.

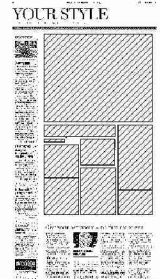
With all the star power that baskets command, you'll want to be extra careful when planting, displaying and maintaining them. Here's how to get the most from your eye-level gardens:

- **Choose the right plants.** Start with trailing plants to give the basket a languid,

relaxed feel. Variegated trailing foliage plants like creeping Charlie, glacier ivy or vinca vine will add sparkling white highlights. Verbena, trailing fuchsia or lantana provides dangling color. And for color and fullness in a hanging basket, try Cool Wave pansies. You can also add other bushy plants for bulk and body. Choose anything that catches your fancy, making sure the colors go together and the plants' mature sizes stay in scale with the basket.

- **Consider where the baskets will hang.**

If you'll be looking up at them, you can make do with only trailing plants in a moss-lined basket with annuals planted along the sides and through the bottom. If you can see the sides and tops, create a mini-landscape just as you would in a garden bed,



with a variety of plant heights, textures and colors. If the basket will be next to a wall, put the taller plants in back; if it can be seen from all sides, put taller plants in the center.

- **How many plants?** Plan on at least three trailing plants, spaced equally around the edge. Then, fill in with as many other plants as will fit. I space plants twice to three times as close to each other in a basket as I would in a bed.

- **Choose plants that grow not only in your climate zone** but also in the various microclimates where they'll be hanging — full-sun plants won't bloom well in a basket hanging under the patio. Also, group together plants that have the same kinds of water preferences.

- **Choose the right basket and liner.** Although very lightweight, plastic baskets don't last long, come in a limited number of sizes and their colors don't always complement the plants in them. Longer-lasting wire baskets come in several options including brass, wrought iron, galvanized and plastic-coated. They also come in larger sizes with lots of planting surfaces. Once filled, they can be very heavy, and because water drains readily out of the bottom, hang them where dripping water won't be a problem.

- **Wire baskets need liners to keep the soil from falling out.** Packing them with sphagnum moss is the most common method. It makes an attractive natural liner that holds water and acts as a reservoir for the basket. Yet these days, coco-fiber or coir liners are becoming popular. The liners are pre-formed and sized to fit wire baskets and are quicker to install.

- **Tend your garden.** Hanging baskets are completely at your mercy for water and nutrients, and may need attention daily or even twice a day in the heat of summer. Test moisture by poking a finger into the soil. If it's dry, irrigate until the water flows from the bottom. Feeding is trickier — too little fertilizer and the plants won't bloom well; too much and the salts will build up in the soil and could burn the plants. I mix a slow-release organic fertilizer into the soil and supplement with a liquid organic fertilizer periodically.

- **To keep your baskets looking their**

**best,** deadhead old flowers if necessary, clip back rangy stems and pick off dead foliage. Around August, some plants slow down on flower production and stop blooming with the heat. If you find that to be the case, snip back the stems to the edge of the basket and, within a couple of weeks, they'll start branching out and blooming again.

*Joe Lamp'l, host of "Growing a Greener World" on PBS, is a master gardener and author. For more information, visit [www.joegardener.com](http://www.joegardener.com).*



**Trailing plants provide a pop of dangling color and fullness.** MORGUEFILE.COM