

CONTAINER PLANTING & SOIL

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It is the time of year when everyone wants to get outside and see beautiful blooms around the landscape. Container planting is perfect for this because so many different and colorful plants can be used. However, the first order of business before planting is filling those containers with the proper growing medium.

Plants like good drainage, especially those in containers. If water pools around plant roots too long, root rot will damage and possibly even kill the plant. For too long, gardeners have been covering the bottom of containers with gravel, pieces of broken pottery, Styrofoam packing material and the like. Do not do this . . . only potting mix should be put into a plant container.

Instead of water draining immediately through the soil, then into gravel or other material and on out the drainage holes, water will completely saturate the soil so that no air spaces are left. This could take a long time and in the interim, plant roots will be starved for oxygen. The following technique demonstrates how different materials and the shape of a container can affect drainage.

Lay a rectangular-shaped sponge flat and saturate it with water. Wait until the excess water has dripped out (this could take 15 or so seconds). Now, turn the sponge 90 degrees so it is upright with the long side of the sponge perpendicular to the floor. Water will leak out because the shape of a container has a lot to do with how much water it holds. A shallow plant container (like the sponge placed flat) filled with soil will hold more water than a tall, narrow container (like the sponge turned upright). When gravel or other material is added to the bottom, it effectively makes that container shallower; water will sit in the top material too long before draining through, and the plant roots will be oxygen-deprived.

So, fill those plant containers all the way with potting mix (not garden soil . . . it is too heavy for containers) and do not use gravel or any other material at the bottom. Healthier plants will be the result!

No class is scheduled this Saturday due to the Easter weekend holiday. Our next class will be Saturday, April 30. UCCE Master Gardeners will present "Landscape Irrigation". The class starts at 9 a.m. and will be held in the Veterans Memorial Building at 130 Placerville Dr. in Placerville. The Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Walk-ins are welcome. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Gardener/.