



HYANNIS
COUNTRY GARDEN

Caring For Hanging Baskets

A basket of flowers on the front porch, deck or patio is one of the summer's pleasures. Here are some tips for keeping your hanging basket looking its best.

Watering: When you water a hanging basket, be sure to do it well. Using a watering wand for ease, spray into the soil, wait a few minutes as water drains out. Then go back and do that again. This waters the entire root ball.

In hot weather and direct sun, most baskets will need watering once a day. In cooler weather or shade, every other day. If you're not sure if your basket needs watering, either feel the soil with your fingers or lift the basket from below to feel if it's light. A light basket is dry, heavy is wet. Never let a hanger get so dry that the plants wilt.

Fertilizing: Hanging baskets come from the garden center well fertilized but you'll need to keep this up. You can either add some time-release fertilizer to the basket a couple of weeks after you bring it home, or use a liquid feed every two or three weeks. Annuals benefit from synthetic fertilizers, so save your organic fertilizer for other plants. If you're applying a liquid synthetic fertilizer, be sure to water the basket well *before* you feed. *Never fertilize a thirsty plant.*

Clipping and Deadheading: Some annuals such as ivy geraniums, Scaevola, and petunias bloom at the ends of their growth. This means that as the summer goes on and the stems of these plants grow longer, all the flowers are at the tips. In order to prevent this from happening you should clip two or three stems back every week, preferably starting early in the summer. Early in the season trim off three or four inches, but later you can cut them back by half or even

two-thirds of their length. If you do a few every week, you'll stimulate new, bushier growth and flower production.

Some plants also produce more flowers when they are deadheaded. Geraniums, marguerite daisies and regular petunias are examples of such plants. Cut off the wilted flowers just below the fading bloom as they go by.

Light: Even shade loving plants such as impatiens require enough light to flower. If your hanging basket is in too much shade it might stop blooming. If this happens, move it to a location with more light, and keep up the fertilization. If the basket stops flowering on the shadier side, rotate it 180 degrees once a week.

Mixed Plants/Combination Baskets: It's typical in mixed containers for some of the plants to dominate and others to fade as the season progresses. As this happens, clip off any stems or leaves that aren't attractive.

Hanging Basket 911: If your plant has been neglected, gotten too dry or been kept too wet, it might be possible to resurrect your plants:

- If the soil has been kept too wet, let it dry a few days before you water again. Clip plants back to four to six inches tall, then fertilize with a synthetic fertilizer.
- If your basket has dried out and the plants look mostly dead, clip them back to four to six inches tall, then fertilize with a synthetic fertilizer. If the weather is very hot, move the basket to a location that gets morning light and afternoon shade while it is recovering.
- If your basket has stopped flowering but is still alive, trim the plants back by a third, fertilize after watering well, and then place it in sunnier location.
- If all the plants are dead (hey, it happens!) toss them and the soil in the compost. You can fill the basket with fresh potting mix and place new plants inside. Use one plant in the center and four or five around the edge so that the basket fills out quickly.