

(Here are some ideas to pass on to your customers who purchase hanging baskets.)

KEEPING HANGING BASKETS HEALTHY

Joseph J. Maisano, Jr.
Extension Agent—Horticulture

Hanging baskets are now the fashion for the year 1973 since they can be grown in the living area both indoors and out. Many types of plants have been potted and will be purchased by the gardener. This article deals with some pointers to keep plants healthy and producing flowers.

In general, all plants need light to grow. However, the homeowner must choose the right conditions for his plants. Ferns need indirect light, while ivy geraniums and geraniums need full sunlight but can tolerate some shade. The light intensity will vary with the time of year and from indoors to outdoors. If indoors, plants should be turned occasionally to allow light to reach all the foliage.

Watering hanging pots is difficult for most gardeners. Hanging pots have a tendency to dry more rapidly because of greater air movement around the plants. A rule of thumb is to apply enough water at one time so some drains through the holes into the saucer. Do not allow water to remain in the saucer. Good drainage is essential. If the soil remains waterlogged, plants will die due to poor soil aeration.

An easy method of watering hanging pots is placing several ice cubes in the pot and allowing them to melt. This saves messy spills when pots are hanging above your head.

Many plant growers are now using slow release fertilizers in the soil mixture. The white, glossy, egg-like plastic pellets on the surface are signs that a slow release fertilizer has been used. If these are not visible, a water soluble fertilizer should be applied weekly to most plants.

In order to keep plants blooming, they must be kept neat and pruned judiciously to encourage new growth. This is especially important on fuchsia, impatiens, lantana, petunia and others. Clean up dead flowers, leaves and foliage at least once a week. While doing this, plants can be inspected for mites or other problems.

Insects such as scale, aphids and whitefly can be controlled by using malathion, diazinon, nicotine or pyrethrins as directed by the manufacturer on the label. If mites are a problem, use a miticide such as kelthane or malathion. Some may want to wash insects off with warm water and soap. This method works for mealy bugs and scale insects. Slugs can be attracted to beer in a shallow container or a slice of potato. Place in the pot and remove the slugs late at night.

Leaf spots caused by powdery mildew, Botrytis, or other fungi attack plants under certain conditions. Control by removing infected plant part, or apply a fungicide such as zineb, phaltan, captan or benomyl as directed on the container label.

Not all problems are from insects or disease. Many are caused by poor culture. Some are:

1. Humidity too high or too low. Flower bud or leaf drop.
2. Plants growing in draft? Leaf and flower bud drop.
3. The soil kept too wet? Sour smell, yellow plant, poor plant form.
4. The plant getting enough light? Note long leggy growth, poor plant habit, flowers and leaves sparse. Too much light will give plant bleached or faded appearance.
5. A sudden change in environment. Leaf and flower drop but new buds showing.

Most hanging basket plants will survive with minimum care providing attention is given to daily watering, if needed, weekly fertilizing and plant grooming. Check with your florist, greenhouse, or garden center when purchasing to see if your plant needs special care. Most of them will be happy to advise you.