

# Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

## FACT SHEET



**Have Gardening Questions?** The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).  
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: [mgghelp@masshort.org](mailto:mgghelp@masshort.org).

### Foliage for Colorful Containers

A foliage container will take a little time to research and design. You can use annuals, perennials, houseplants, grasses, and small evergreens/shrubs. (Small evergreens, perennials and shrubs can last for several years in a container.) Use an odd number of plants (3 is easy) and be sure to consider the color, height and light requirement. Read the labels! Another alternative is “One Plant, One Pot”. Large and/or bright leaved hostas, Japanese Maples, and small evergreens are particularly suited for a good sized pot. If the pot is frost-proof, perennial plants can live in the pots for several years. Remember to winter them in a cold shaded area, or in an unheated garage. Check in midwinter to see that pots inside have not dried out, and water if necessary.

Choose your container first. Bright-colored containers make a bold statement; use neutral colors if you want the container to blend with the environment. Look for an interesting shape. Consider a more vertical pot to bring foliage even closer into view. If the pot is large, fill in the bottom 1/3<sup>rd</sup> with styrofoam peanuts or empty plastic bottles. This will make the container lighter and easier to move. Add a good quality soil. Do not use garden “dirt”, and add a little slow-release fertilizer.

Now get ready to plant. Before you choose your plants,

read the labels first for size and hardiness. You may mix plants with different hardiness, but be prepared to either let some die over winter, or plan to overwinter tropicals indoors. Hint: Most of our area is Zone 6a or LOWER. A higher zone number means winter protection, so consider planting more tender plants together for ease of care, or just remove the tender ones and bring them inside in the fall. There is always the compost pile as well.

In creating a mixed pot, use a tall, upright bold plant as an accent to balance the height of the planter. Next choose a medium height mounding plant to buffer the vertical and trailing plants. Use this plant as a “wow” factor with large or small, and/or colorful foliage. Finally, use a trailing plant to create a flow. Vary foliage shapes and sizes for best interest. A solid color leaf will calm the arrangement-color and variegation give it pizzazz. Houseplants (i.e., tropical or semi-tropical plants) are a great source for colorful foliage.

Container gardening doesn't have to stop when the growing season is over. Replace more tender plants with ornamental cabbage or kale. Falling leaves late in the season will offer more light, and these plants will continue to put on a good show until a hard frost.

Foliage Plants for Colorful Containers					
Vertical		Mounding		Trailing	
Cannas	nh	Heuchera (many colors)	p	Lamium (all varieties)	p
Small Ornamental Grasses	p	Persian Shield	nh	Pothos	nh
Caladium	h	Fern ‘Jap. Painted’	p	Tradescantia	nh
Draceana	p	Carex (grass) ‘Ice Dance’	p	Barren Strawberry	p
Leucothoe ‘Rainbow’	ps	Heucherella ‘Sweet Tea’	p	Asparagus Fern	nh
Colocasia (Elephant Ear)	nh	Hosta—great variety	p	Rosary Vine	nh
Swiss Chard (giant)	veg	Coleus (many colors)	nh	Grape Ivy	nh
Japanese Maple	ps	Rex Begonia	nh	Vinca (variegated)	p
Code: nh-	not hardy	p-	perennial	ps-	perennial shrub/tree

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>