

Hanging Baskets

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Because hanging baskets can be moved easily from one location to another, it is possible to enjoy summer color all around the house and garden. These versatile planters can be used as accents in front of the home or to brighten a deck or patio. Many plants have been introduced in recent years that are ideally suited to hanging basket plants as they are heat and/or drought tolerant. Following are some colorful and tough plants that flourish in hanging baskets.

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Blue Wonder (*Scaevola aemula*), introduced in 1990, is a vigorous plant that thrives in hot, humid areas. The profuse, blue, fan-shaped flowers hang in threes from each node. Blue Wonder prospers in full sun and a consistently moist soil. Because Blue Wonder is sensitive to phosphorus, use a high nitrogen fertilizer with little phosphorus.

Golden Globes (*Lysimachia procumbens*) boasts bright, yellow-gold blooms in clusters of five to seven on trailing, bronzy, dark-green foliage. Blooming continuously throughout the summer, Golden Globes makes a bright and cheerful addition to any garden. This plant needs high light and good air circulation. Though it is a tough plant -- hardy to 30F -- Golden Globes may be susceptible to mites.

Egyptian Star Flower (*Pentas lanceolata*) flourishes in heat and drought; warm nights tend to enhance the plant's growth and flower color as will light shade. Several compact cultivars are especially suited to hanging baskets: 'Lavender Delight', 'Pink Profusion', and 'Starburst.' Because these plants are salt sensitive, be careful in fertilizer practices.

Hawkesbury River Daisy (*Brachycome multifida*) is a perennial that blooms constantly through the summer. The 1-inch, lavender-blue flowers have a yellow center and require little maintenance; the old flowers just shrivel and fade away. The wispy, finely cut foliage is a soft-textured backdrop for the delicate-looking flowers. Though brachycomes enjoy high light, some shading may be necessary in hotter climates. Use a high-nitrogen fertilizer to ensure a full, blooming plant.

Royal Jewels (*Lobelia ricardii*) is a perennial lobelia that tolerates heat better than its annual relative. Medium- to dark-blue flowers and dark-green, purple tinged foliage are both larger than the annual lobelia. Royal Jewels blooms continuously summer through fall. Hardy to 30F, this plant requires high light and good air circulation.

Silver Brocade (*Artemisia stelleriana*), a unique dusty miller with a cascading habit, exhibits silver-white foliage with a felty texture. When combined with pink or blue flowers, Silver Brocade can create a strong visual impact.

Coral Fountain (*Russelia equisetiformis*) has unique, grass-like foliage that can cascade up to 6 feet. The elongated, red-orange flowers drip from the foliage, creating a shock of bright color. Hardy to 30F, this plant tolerates both heat and drought. Coral Fountain grows best in high light and a well-drained soil on the dry side. Use low fertilizer rates as the plant is susceptible to salt burn; for this reason, do not use slow-release fertilizers.

Purslanes (*Portulaca oleracea*) are reliable choices for hanging baskets. Very drought tolerant, this plant thrives in hot sun. The trailing, succulent foliage is somewhat unique for a hanging plant, and the vivid flowers bloom in a variety of bright colors.

Don't be afraid to combine several different plants in your hanging baskets; however, be sure that the plants have the same light and water requirements. When planting combination baskets, use baskets with simple designs so the container will not compete with the plants. Combine different heights and textures. Try to blend compatible colors. Gardeners often find it difficult to combine orange flowers with other colors since orange does not harmonize well. Use white with orange for a quieting effect. Pinks are easiest to combine and will do well with lavenders, whites, roses, and blues.

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