

Wenke Wisdom

Hanging Basket Care

Your flowering hanging baskets can bloom and thrive for many months – with a little help from you. Follow these easy guidelines to keep your plants healthy and beautiful throughout the season.

Is the Light Right? Match your plant's location with its light and heat tolerance for best results. Most flowering hanging baskets will continue flowering in partial shade, however, some will not tolerate the heat and dryness of all-day sunlight.

- *Ivy and Zonal Geraniums and Portulacas* tolerate the brightest and hottest conditions and an occasional drying out.
- *Petunias* – also appreciate a sunny location – Keep continually moist but not wet.
- *Impatiens and Begonias* keep the shadiest spots bright but may not hold up in high light and heat. Can tolerate a few hours of morning sun. New Guinea Impatiens can handle several hours of sun. Keep evenly moist and grow in well-drained soil.
- *Fuchsias* do best in a spot that gets some shade during the middle of the day. A few hours of morning sun is about all they can handle.

Water before Wilting!!! Don't wait for wilting as your cue to water. Flowering plants do best if you never allow them to wilt. Take extra care with watering since hanging plants dry out faster than garden plants because they're exposed to more wind and warmer temperatures. Under average conditions, flowering plants in 10" diameter hanging baskets use 16 to 32 fluid ounces of water per day. With proper watering, the plants should last 2 to 4 days between waterings unless there are extremely high temperatures when you have to water daily...

Be sure to water thoroughly...If the basket dries out, the soil may shrink and allow the water to quickly run out of the drain hole, fooling you into thinking it's thoroughly watered, when in fact, the water is bypassing the roots. Make sure the basket becomes heavy with water, about 7 to 9 pounds. You may have to water again in 5 to 10 minutes to thoroughly moisten the soil. Water retentive crystals are now available in garden centers. When putting together your own hanging baskets and containers, mix some crystals into the soil at time of planting, and they will swell when watered and retain moisture until it's needed by the plant. They are especially useful for hanging baskets.

Fertilize when needed...Even if you've never allowed them to wilt, your plants may develop yellow leaves and poor flowering which can indicate a need for fertilizer. Add 1 or 2 teaspoons per gallon of water-soluble fertilizer that has 15 to 20% nitrogen into the watering can every two weeks and your baskets should stay green and flowering. You can also use plastic-coated slow-release fertilizer beads available at garden centers. Apply one to two tablespoons to the soil surface and scratch it into the first inch of soil at the start of summer to last all season long. It's okay to use the slow release and the water-soluble fertilizer at the same time, but you can fertilize less often, monthly should do.

Keep in mind that if a little fertilizer is good, a lot is NOT better...Too much fertilizer can burn roots and damage plants. Ask someone at your local garden center or greenhouse for help and invest in a little fertilizer to keep your plants flowering all summer.

Clean up your Plants...With proper watering and fertilizing, your basket plants will flower so much that you may need to remove dead flowers and seed pods. This helps keep the plant looking its best and is a nice way to relax after a long day, which is what gardening is all about.

Plan for Vacation Survival...Don't forget your flowering hang-ups when you go on vacation. If you can't get a "plant sitter" to water them for you while you are gone, take them down from their hangers and set them on the ground in the shade. With a thorough watering before you leave, most plants will last a week on the ground in a well shaded location. Flowering may be reduced when you first re-hang your plants, but they will soon return to their summer glory.

If your plants get large and overgrown, right before you go on vacation is a good time to trim them back and remove some of the extra growth.

Maintaining Quality Depends on You...Commercial plant growers have worked with researchers at Michigan State University to produce beautiful, healthy flowering hanging baskets to entrust to your care. Follow these guidelines to keep them beautiful and healthy – and to get the most from your investment. Take the time to learn how to care for and enjoy your plants.

Information from Michigan State University with help of the Western Michigan Bedding Plant Association, Bedding Plants Foundation, American Floral Endowment, and Professional Plant Growers Association