

ATHOME

This is the time your backyard comes to life

The last week of June is when outdoor living really begins. Late June is when sprucing up the yard is inspired by Fourth of July parties and outdoor summer living. Nurseries are still filled with flowers to fill your container gardens and landscaped beds and it is not too late to start a vegetable garden or plant some incredible edibles such as blueberries, cucumbers, herbs, and potted patio tomatoes and peppers.

To conserve water and cut back on lawn weeds, raise the height of your mower this week so that you are removing only one third of the grass blade when the lawn is two to three inches tall. A lawn allowed to grow taller in the summer casts shade onto the roots to keep sun-loving weeds from sprouting and conserves the moisture already in the soil. To make any lawn look better, remember these two tips: Sharpen the mower for a cleaner cut and use an edger or string trimmer to outline the lawn with a crisp, clean border.

Got hanging baskets? Bountiful, blooming baskets are fantastic celebrations of summer and now is when

you can find fuchsia baskets on sale to hang from a shaded porch, ivy geraniums in a container to splash across a sunny patio and mixed displays of blooming annuals to brighten every part of the garden.

Here are some tips for keeping baskets and container gardens happy once you take them home from the nursery.

Keep your baskets watered – but not too much. Incorrect watering is the number one reason container gardens and hanging baskets fail to thrive. Most hanging baskets need water every single day – unless they are subjected to heavy rains or cold nights. You need to water until you see the



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drainage run out from the bottom of the pot. Don't water a plant that looks wilted without first poking your finger into the soil. Overwatering or poor drainage will rot the roots of any plant and the result is a plant that looks thirsty but is actually drowning. Poke your bare finger into the soil down to the first knuckle. If the soil is moist, don't add more water – check to see that your potted plants are not being swamped by rain or sitting in a saucer of their own drainage water.

Dead-head – or get snippy. Fuchsia baskets are especially sensitive to faded blooms. If you don't remove the old flowers and the berry-like bead just behind the blossom of a fuchsia,

then the basket will stop flowering as it puts energy into seed formation. Snip back petunias, verbenias and other overly enthusiastic annuals in baskets or pots if they start to grow leggy. Remove the spent blooms from geraniums by bending back the stem from where it is attached to the trunk of the geranium. You should feel a satisfying snap when you dead head geraniums. Use your pinching fingers to remove faded blooms from other potted plants.

Fertilize – a lot! Plants in pots cannot search out food with long reaching roots. Hanging baskets do best when they are fed with a liquid plant food every week – but at a diluted level. If you are not going to give weak but weekly feedings to your plants, then add a slow-release plant food such as Osmocote to the soil so that they can enjoy a constant supply of nutrients even if you forget to feed them.

Have a vacation plan. Avoid the heartbreak of coming home to dirty laundry and dead plants when you return from summer vacation. The best plant insurance is a trusted neighbor to water your

potted plants while you are away but for short trips you can soak your pots and then move them into the shade or place potted plants into a shallow wading pool with a few inches of water. Drip irrigation on a timer is another option to keep your plants hydrated for weeks at a time.

Baskets don't have to hang ... When you see hanging baskets on sale this week don't fret if you have no place to hang them. Simply set the basket down in a leaky bird bath or empty pot turned upside down. You can also bring the basket home and carefully deconstruct it or remove all the plants from inside the basket. If you immediately plant and water the plants you just removed, you can fill several smaller containers with the abundance of plants that fill a large basket. Use a serrated bread knife to saw through the roots so that each plant has a root ball before you transplant them to a new location.

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