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## Trumpet Vine

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Submit articles electronically in Word format and photos in JPG format.

### **Maintaining Shrubs and Trees in Pots**

*Compiled by Sandy Welches, MGV 2005*

*Where bed space is at a premium, growing in containers can be the best way to get more plants into your garden. To keep them beautiful and healthy, give these plantings special attention.*



[www.azplantlady.com](http://www.azplantlady.com)

In small gardens where growing options are limited, container growing is a useful solution. Even in larger gardens, permanent plants in containers are a way to green up patios or other spots where there is no space to dig. It is a way to grow sought-after plants when borders are already full, or make room for a choice, stand-alone specimen.

By growing shrubs and smaller trees in pots you can create the same layers and depth of planting you would find in a deep border. Containers also restrict a plant's size, making it easier to accommodate.

Plant choice is key, marrying pot to plant. Unless you opt for a compact or dwarf selection, try to avoid large trees or suckering shrubs such as lilac. Underplanting a small tree with attractive shade-tolerant groundcover perennials such as *Epimedium* can create appealing, naturalistic tiers in your container.

At the Royal Horticultural Society garden called Hyde Hall in Essex, UK, a number of shrubs in containers sit in spaces that would otherwise be bare. They include woody plants with at least two seasons of interest and good structure the rest of the year, such as *Euonymus alatus*, or 'Burning Bush' -- grown for its fall foliage color and winged stems in winter.

Garden Manager Andrew Hellman has tips for success. He recommends using a potting mix that includes loam to hold onto nutrients and maintain good structure for root growth, such as a mix of two thirds good garden soil and one third multipurpose compost.

"I also add controlled-release fertilizer when planting. Permanent plantings are hungry plantings, and even the largest pots run out of nutrients. Container plantings will quickly show signs that they are hungry. To avoid spoiling the look of the plant, it is important that they are fed before symptoms become apparent."

#### Potting up and potting on

Choose a container that complements your plant in size and style. When planting it up, allow for a 2-inch lip at the top to let water pool on the compost surface when watering.

Plants will eventually need repotting when the roots fill the container. This refreshes the compost, which loses its structure and becomes compacted over time.

*Repot into a container just one size larger.* Avoid

jumping straight to a much bigger container (known as overpotting), as this can lead to problems with drainage and can actually -- counterintuitively -- inhibit root development. In the years when you don't need to repot, try top-dressing by scraping off the top 2 inches of compost in spring and replace with new.

#### Ongoing care

*Once the plant has filled the biggest container available, it can be maintained by root pruning.* Remove the specimen from its container, cut off up to a third of the outer roots and repot into the same container with fresh compost.

Vine weevil can be a particularly problematic pest of long-term container plants. Check for white, C-shaped grubs when repotting and squash them by hand. Liquid pesticide drenches and nematode biological control are also available. Like all plantings, weeds can creep into the growing medium, so pull them out when they arise. Moss and liverwort can also appear in shaded containers but are not necessarily a problem -- just scrape them away if you don't like their appearance.



[www.nwberrylfoundation.org](http://www.nwberrylfoundation.org)

#### Watering well

*Getting watering right is the key to success. "Be aware that even heavy rainfall isn't good at giving plants in pots the water they need,"* Andrew says. "We water really large pots three times a week in spring and summer; smaller containers may

need to be watered every day.” *He also gives a base dressing of a general-purpose feed in spring and waters with a multipurpose liquid feed several times during the summer.*

Aim to give them just the water they need to saturate the compost, not much more. When water runs out the bottom of the pot it is washing nutrients away. However, don't let pots sit in water either. Set them on feet to raise them off the ground and allow them to drain freely. When you water, it may be worthwhile scraping away the soil in some parts to make sure there are no dry spots. If you are unable to water frequently enough in summer, consider installing an automatic drip-irrigation system.

#### Andrew's dos and don'ts

##### Do

Try some creative pruning to make a container-grown shrub into a real feature in the garden.

Water pots even if it has rained. Rain often bounces off the top growth, leaving the compost dry.

Water outside the growing season. Aim for soil that feels just moist. You may find you need to water even in winter if it is particularly dry.

##### Don't

Use containers that taper in at the top. When it comes time to repot, it can be impossible to remove larger plants without breaking the pot.

Position tall containers, or those top-heavy trees, in windy spots. Or, if you do, anchor them to prevent their blowing over.



[www.wilsonrosegarden.com](http://www.wilsonrosegarden.com)



[www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk)

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