

Consider container gardening for splash of color

Consider using a container of annuals to add color where it's not practical or possible to bring in the tiller and create a flowerbed. Or what about that area under the tree where grass doesn't want to grow and where it would be difficult to till without damaging the tree's roots and the tiller? Turn a bare spot into a splash of color with an appropriately placed container of annuals.

Be sure to select plants based on the exposure. Some annuals will quickly bake from full sun exposure and others will become leggy and bloom poorly in a shady location.

Impatiens and begonias do well in shaded places and remain in flower almost continuously. Caladiums also do well in containers in shady areas. They don't bloom but they have very colorful leaves.

It's more difficult to grow container plants in full sun but there are some annuals to consider for sunny spots. Vinca and all types of portulaca are heat tolerant and do well in full sun.

There are many other annuals that can be successfully grown in containers. You might like to try ageratum or salvia. In addition to annual salvia, there are numerous perennial types to try. And there are sun-tolerant begonia and sun coleus cultivars for full-sun places.

Don't be afraid to try something different. Add a plant or two of hot peppers. They do well in containers and will provide color as the peppers turn from green to orange, red or even purple based on variety and how long you leave them unpicked. Of course if you enjoy hot peppers, you'll want to pick some, too.

Plant your annuals in a big enough container. A three to five gallon container will allow the plants to grow. Also make sure the container has adequate drainage. You'll have disappointing results if the plant's roots stay too wet.

Use a good quality lightweight potting mix that holds moisture yet still provides good drainage. Then fertilize and water as needed.

The April plant clinic will be held Thursday, April 21 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Fort Walton Beach at the Okaloosa County Extension building, 127 W. Hollywood Blvd.

The plant clinic is an event for people to bring in samples of plants for diagnosis, including weeds for identification. If you have a plant problem that you would like diagnosed, bring a fresh sample of the weed, plant, insect, etc., to the clinic. This may include a plant stem with several leaves, a 4-inch square of grass with roots attached, etc. You may also bring a sample of your soil for pH testing.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, April 13, 2011