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Jim Wilson's Container Gardening

Jim Wilson
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Everyone's doing it—from basil-oregano medleys in traditional terra cotta pots to fuschia dangling from wire baskets. Everyone is taking up the fine art and tricky science of container gardening. So says author Jim Wilson, former co-host of the popular PBS television show "The Victory Garden," in his new no-nonsense guide to growing flowers, herbs, and vegetables in confined spaces.

The book is filled with practical directions on how to coax lush foliage from restricted conditions. In a conversational tone, Wilson walks gardeners through selecting appropriate containers—drainage, drainage, drainage!—and purchasing or mixing potting soils and mediums that deliver needed pH levels and micronutrients. Without these, plants can starve. Wilson also provides pragmatic tips on selecting and caretaking of plants in various climates.

Orchestrating containers requires a little finesse: planning for future growth, envisioning all-season blooms, and composing plants with an eye toward color, height, and foliage texture. Wilson supplies matter-of-fact instructions for all these considerations as well as ideas about staging multiple containers outdoors for maximum punch.

Wilson's general instructions are useful to both green thumbs and novices, but the book's final two chapters are a real boon. There, readers find an encyclopedia of container-adapted plants divided by type and climate suitability—"mound-shaped plants that prefer cool summers," for instance.

In addition, there is a chapter that lists recommendations from U.S. and Canadian experts. These horticulturists at public gardens scattered across the continent, from Wisconsin to Wichita, report on tried-and-true cultivars and new plants that thrive in containers in their growing zone.

Wilson doesn't indulge in flowery prose in this book, but he does cover the fundamentals of container gardening, tossing in some above-average soil science, creative options for make-it-yourself containers, and stellar resources for choosing the right plants for tight quarters.
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