

A Touch of Green Fingers

May 1st

It was very appropriate that the sun shone (for the first time in ages) for this May meeting, as it got us all in the mood for thinking of gardens/tubs/balconies etc and how we can brighten them up. Enter Dame Vicki Sonnenberg, Pennells' garden centre manager from Sleaford, to show us just how! Vicki has worked in garden centres for over 20 years, so we were in very safe, green-fingered hands. As someone who just has to look at a plant to kill it, I was very ready for some topical tips. I have summarised her advice as best I could, as she demonstrated how to fill tubs, baskets and planters.

Baskets

- Peat free compost is good, but might need extra watering, so check it carefully. Leave space round the edges so water does not run out.
- Place plants on the soil in the basket to check the look and spacing of it all. Plant something with height in the middle or at the back for contrast. Plant pale or contrasting colours together.
- Check root balls carefully and snip tops off plants to increase root growth and so they will bush out. Put a hole in the plastic of your basket for drainage.
- Fertilising is very important. Fertiliser gel can help moisture retention also. Fuchias and geraniums (and loads I can't spell) make for vibrant colour contrasts. Look for trailing plants for hanging baskets so they can spill over. Plant at the front.
- She placed her basket in a pot to keep it steady as she planted. Once everything is in, tap it gently to loosen the soil. Remember that rim to retain water round the edge.

Herbs in planters

- She chose purple sage, golden thyme and lavender for colour and scent. Use free draining compost in planters and add in John Innes potting grit to retain moisture. Top dress with large grade Alpine grit for the same reason.

Large pots

- The above all apply, but she recommends putting an inverted, discarded little plant pot to cover the drainage hole to retain moisture.
- Think of front and back views of your pot. Use some green ferns or similar to add height and colour.

In general, think about feeding, either frequent liquid fluid supplements or slow release fertilising tablets. Tomorite is very good for baskets, but shrubs need a more balanced feed, There are lots of gadgets for watering if you are on holiday. There, you are all set now to rival Alan Titchmarsh or Monty Don! Thanks to Vicki for her lively and informative demonstration and for generously donating her 4 examples to the raffle.

Disclaimer- I've done my best, but if you follow this and everything dies, please don't blame me! Good luck and happy planting.

Barbara Pearce.

