

Window boxes, Containers & Tree Beds

Brooklyn has funny light situations. You can have it sunny for a short time with hot sun and then buildings shade the site.

Know your limitations and your site's limitations!

Watering is particularly tricky because your window box or container will dry out faster on sunny days, and wind can suck moisture out of a pot. Check the soil moisture by sticking your finger in the soil every day. If the soil still feels moist, don't apply water.

Plants for Window Boxes and Containers (Filler, Spiller, Thriller)

Petunia – continuous vibrant blooms even in the harshest heat. Come in shades of white, red, pink, and purple, even striped, speckled, and fringed varieties. Consider *Petunia axillaris* for a bushy plant. Cascading Wave or Surfinia petunias will spill over the edge of your window box.

Fuchsia magellanica – most varieties of fuchsia love the shade, so as long as your window box is not in full sun, the plant will reward you all season long with extravagant purple and pink blossoms and maybe hummingbirds.

Impatiens walleriana – easy to maintain, grows well in containers, and comes in a wide range of colors like pink, red, purple, orange, and yellow.

Verbena – Sun-loving, mounding and trailing habit. Comes in a variety of colors, including the 'Violet Ice' cultivar (purple blooms) and 'Candy Cane' (red and white stripes).

Snapdragon – with flashy tall spikes covered in lavish blooms, snapdragon is an eye-catching addition to any window box. Summer snapdragon (*Angelonia angustifolia*) grows 12 to 18 inches, while common snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*) can grow anywhere from four inches to three feet.

Coleus - abounding with colorful foliage, its bushy appearance makes coleus a great filler and accent plant. Bold varieties like 'Chocolate Covered Cherry' and 'Kong Red' are showy enough to be the main event in a window box.

Dusty Miller (*Senecio cineraria*) – textured silver foliage makes a nice contrast to colorful blooms. The ‘Silver Dust’ cultivar grows 12 to 18 inches, while the ‘Silver Lace’ and ‘Cirrus’ varieties reach heights of six to eight inches.

Licorice plant (*Helichrysum petiolare*) – unique felted foliage, nice contrast. Cultivar ‘White Licorice’ is silver-white, while ‘Lemon Licorice’ is a buttery yellow.

Sweet Potato Vine - the lush foliage comes in many colors. Consider the lime green *Ipomoea batatas* ‘Margarita’, the deep purple ‘Sweetheart’, or the gray/green/pink ‘Tricolor’ varieties.

Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*) – vigorous ground cover that's also stunning in window boxes. Available in shades of green and gold with densely packed, rounded leaves that cascade nicely down a window box.

Ornamental grasses can add sensational height, color, and texture to a window box. Try a grass like *Pennisetum setaceum* ‘Fireworks’, which has delicately frothy fronds and a vibrant purplish-pink color.

Sedum ‘Autumn Joy’ bloom from August into November, they start pink and mature to a copper befitting of autumn.

Don't be afraid to design a container with only one fabulous plant or several plants of one variety. Many great container gardens use just a single plant variety. If you can't check and water every day, consider growing just succulents in your container. Use special succulent soil. They might need to be watered only once a week.

Think about a fall and winter window box:

You can plant small evergreens, such as dwarf Hinoki cypress and blue star juniper.

Cyclamens will work unless we get a very long cold spell.

Some of your summer plants such as Dusty Miller, Licorice plant, grasses are showy all winter.

You can also put cut evergreen branches (cedar, juniper, blue spruce, holly with its red berries), twigs, and reeds in the window box.

Decorative artificial apples, pinecones, dried hydrangea, *Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’, or other dried ornamental flowers.

Tree Beds

Mulch holds moisture and suppresses weeds. Put a 2- or 3-inch layer of untreated wood chips placed about **8 inches away** from the trunk. Groundcovers (creeping or short-growing plants) can do that too all that too, plus you get a carpet of green and sometimes flowers.

Advice for your poor beleaguered trees is just keep watering during dry spells and adding a half-inch of compost where possible this spring. DSNY is making free compost available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/our-work/reduce-reuse-recycle/get-compost>

Do not plant woody plants, they take too many nutrients away from the tree, and the tree is the most important plant in the tree bed.

Is your street tree a good candidate for groundcover? Not enough soil for planting? You should NEVER add soil to a street tree bed. If in doubt, don't plant. Before planting anything, determine how much sunlight reaches the bed and choose plants accordingly. Use small, young plants or plugs to cause as little disturbance as possible to the tree's roots during planting. Space them so that when full grown, they will touch to create a blanket of foliage.

Groundcovers for Tree Beds:

For Dry Shade

Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*)

Coral bells (*Heuchera americana*)

Foam flower (*Tiarella cordifolia*)

Oak sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*)

Wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*)

For Dry Sun

Blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium* 'Lucerne')

Creeping phlox (*Phlox subulata*)

Oak sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*)

Prickly-pear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*)

Wild petunia (*Ruellia humilis*)

Sedum 'Autumn Joy'

Remember, these plants are low maintenance, not no maintenance. Gently water the bed thoroughly and regularly for the first year or two. Your street tree needs at least 20 gallons of water weekly, March through December. Every spring, add a thin layer of compost around your plants. In early winter, consider covering the bed lightly with evergreen branches to protect the soil and plants from winter salt spray.

Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) has many useful links, including how to keep rats out of your garden - https://www.bbg.org/gardening/article/managing_rats_in_city_gardens

BBG Street Tree Stewardship https://www.bbg.org/community/street_trees

Consider adopting a rain garden (bioswale) <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dep/water/rain-gardens.page> and <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dep/whats-new/harbor-protectors.page>

Consider becoming a BUG (Brooklyn Urban Gardener) – BBG’s real-life training program for community volunteers. The BUG certificate program is a multiple-session course that covers the basics in urban gardening and community greening. It connects the educational resources of Brooklyn Botanic Garden to the greening efforts of Brooklyn’s communities. 2022 applications are due by June 1 - https://www.bbg.org/community/brooklyn_urban_gardener_certificate_application

This year’s Greenest Block in Brooklyn contest will return to its block-wide format, showcasing community efforts to display the burgeoning botanic beauty of Brooklyn. Remember, blocks are evaluated in June and July by visiting judges from corner to corner and only plantings that can be seen from the street are scored. Even though, due to ongoing construction, you won’t want to enter your block, there are free BBG Community Greening workshops that might prove useful:

https://classes.bbg.org/ShowSchedule.awp?&Mode=GROUP&Group=GBCMG&Title=&utm_source=Listrak&utm_medium=Email&utm_term=Sign+up+for+Community+Greening+workshops!&utm_campaign=Get+Ready+for+the+Greenest+Block+in+Brooklyn+contest

!