

Southern Living

OUR 10 EASIEST LAYER CAKES

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the locals reveal the *Natchez Mystique*

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Melissa Shepherd isn't a basket case, but if she were, you couldn't blame her. Each year, she and a team of gardening specialists at Walt Disney World in Orlando assemble "an outrageous number" of new hanging baskets—more than 6,000—to decorate its parks and resorts with petunias, geraniums, and other flowers. Follow her tips to create inexpensive, colorful displays that even your wicked stepsisters will like.

Why Grow Hanging Baskets? These containers suspended by chains or wire offer distinct advantages, says Melissa. First, they elevate color to eye level instead of relegating it to the ground. Second, many trailing plants (such as million bells,

bacopa, and ivy geraniums) do better in baskets than they do in the ground.

Basic Ingredients Melissa starts with a wire-frame basket into which she presses moist sphagnum moss to make a shell. Nearly invisible strands of monofilament line attached to the sides of the frame help keep the moss in place. Next, she fills the basket with commercial potting soil and mixes in a tablespoon or so of slow-release fertilizer. Finally, she plants flowers she knows will make a splash.

Surefire Winners Although many flowers thrive in hanging baskets, Melissa counts on the following for a long-lasting show.

- **Million bells** (*Calibrachoa* sp.)—trailing

Magical Containers

A Walt Disney World expert shows us the secrets to beautiful hanging baskets. It isn't tricky when you listen to Mickey! By **Steve Bender**, photography **Ralph Anderson**



'Dragon Wing' begonias, a 'Margarita' sweet potato vine, chenille plants, and spider plants form a sumptuous mixed basket in front of Spaceship Earth at Epcot.

plants that resemble miniature petunias; come in almost every color; bloom nonstop; don't need deadheading (removing of old flowers); plant in sun.

- **Mini Cascade Hybrid ivy geraniums**—showy clusters of red, pink, salmon, or lavender flowers on cascading stems; take summer heat from the

“Doing a basket with three or four different plants adds color and texture and enhances the story you’re trying to tell.”

MELISSA SHEPHERD, DESIGNER

Lower South northward; need some deadheading; plant in sun.

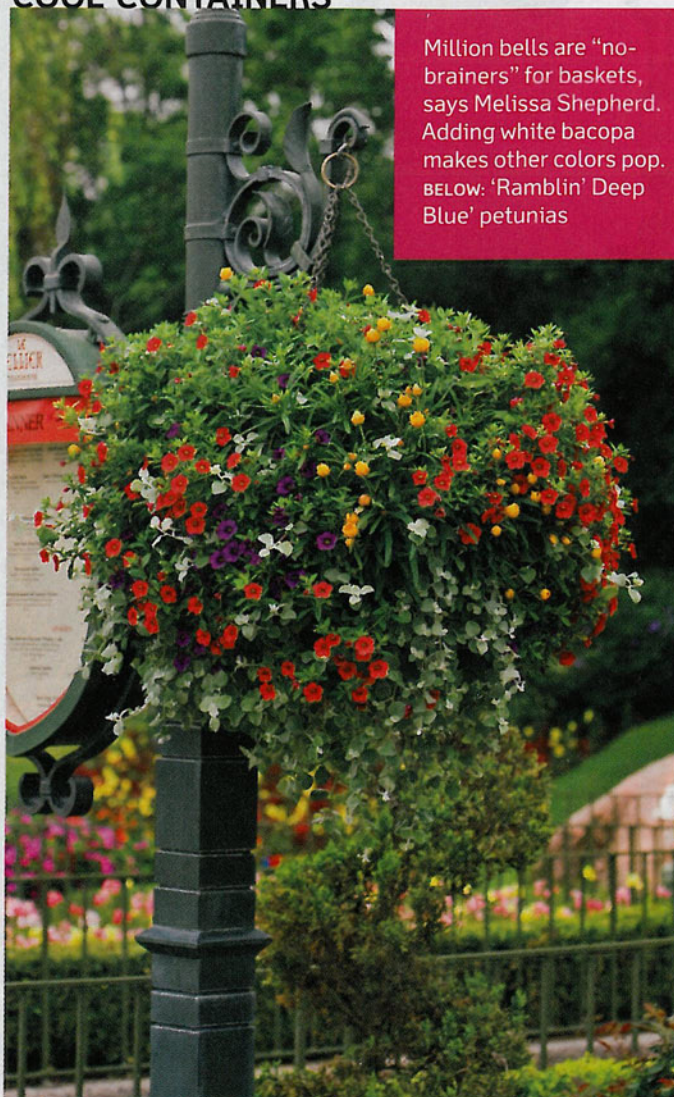
- **Wave Series and Ramblin’ Hybrid petunias**—hundreds of nonstop blooms in blue, purple, lavender, pink, and rose on heat-tolerant, wide-spreading plants; don’t need deadheading; plant in sun.

- **‘Dragon Wing’ begonias**—upright, mounding growers with glossy, green leaves and red flowers; good as anchor plants for center of pot; prefer light shade.

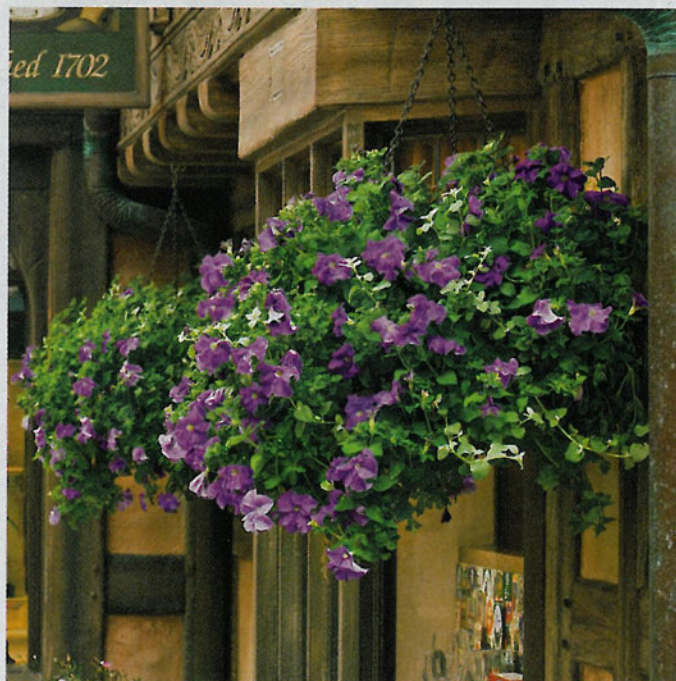
Single Colors vs. Mixed Baskets

Use plants in one color, such as all pink geraniums, when aiming for simplicity or mass impact. Mixed baskets act more like flower arrangements that you appreciate close-up. “Doing a basket with three or four different plants adds color and texture and enhances the story you’re trying to tell,” Melissa explains.

The key to successful mixed baskets is adding filler plants—spreading plants with



Million bells are “no-brainers” for baskets, says Melissa Shepherd. Adding white bacopa makes other colors pop. BELOW: ‘Ramblin’ Deep Blue’ petunias



HANGING BASKET HOW-TO



Step 1: To re-create Melissa’s basket (shown on page 53), begin by inserting small spider plants into the sides. They will fill out and cover up the moss.



Step 2: Fill the basket with moistened commercial potting soil.



Step 3: Add begonias, a sweet potato vine, and chenille plants for color. Hang the finished basket, and watch it grow.