

KINGMAN IS GROWING! COLUMN

Gardening in wooden barrels

By *Laura Murphy*, Mohave County Master Gardener

If you want to add some old-world charm to your patio, consider planting a half-wine barrel. The aged wood has a character and appearance that enhances the beauty of plants and it's a good way to help in the recycling effort. In addition, wine barrels are readily available at most garden and home supply stores and for a price that's considerably less than comparable sized terra cotta pots.

The roominess of half-barrels makes them ideal for the planting of dwarf fruit trees including; Key Lime, Kumquat, Limequat, Black Jack Fig, Pomegranate, Guava, and Bonanza Peach. Half-barrels also make excellent containers for growing small shrubs, herbs, and vegetables. Vining veggies like squash, melons and cucumbers are especially appealing as the vines cascade down the sides of the barrel. Or a grape vine supported by a stake or trellis would perfect plant for a wine barrel.

There's also plenty of room in wood barrels for groupings of several plants - tall, medium and low-growing ones. If you're growing a dwarf tree, grape vine or other single-trunk plant, I advise an under-planting of seasonal flowers to add color and to shade the soil.

As with all pots, half-barrels require drainage holes. Most are sold without, so you'll have to drill some holes in the bottom. Just turn the barrel upside down and drill several drainage holes using a three-quarter or one-inch wood drill bit. This should provide adequate drainage. From the inside of the barrel, cover the holes with pieces of window screening to keep the soil from washing out. Hold the patches of screening in place with heavy duty staples and a staple gun.

If you think you might want to move the barrel from time to time, consider adding casters to the bottom of the barrel before filling it with soil. In addition to making it easy to move, the casters will elevate the barrel off the surface of the patio for enhanced drainage.

The soil mix you fill your barrel with should be of high quality. If you're growing dwarf trees or other woody or perennial plants, the soil will support their growth for years to come. In addition, it's important that the soil in such a large container be well-drained to avoid potential root-rot and soil aeration problems. Any quality potting soil will do, but because these soils are mostly heavy peat, I

recommend adding perlite to lighten the mix for improved drainage and aeration. One part perlite should be mixed thoroughly with every 5 parts potting soil. Place the barrel in its final location before filling it. Do not place drainage material, such as stones, in the bottom of the barrel. This will actually prevent water from draining freely out of the barrel. Fill the barrel from the bottom up with soil mix, leaving a few inches at the top for watering.

Although half-barrels can be hand-watered, a more convenient way is to hook up an automatic irrigation system for watering. One-quarter inch, In-line drip tubing is best for delivering water to the barrel. Select tubing with emitters spaced 6 inches apart. The tubing is wrapped on top of the soil in the barrel. Use enough tubing and emitters to provide even distribution of the water. A simple battery operated water valve can be connected to a nearby hose bib and water run to the in-line tubing via a one-half inch main supply line and one-quarter inch secondary line. Container watering kits can also be purchased at hardware and home supply stores.

Half barrels are an attractive and inexpensive way to add planting space to your yard or patio. Look for them at most garden and nursery centers.

For more information, contact The University of Arizona Mohave County Cooperative Extension, 101 E. Beale St Ste A, Kingman or telephone (928) 753-3788.

**CONTACT: VICKI COOMBS
ADMINISTRATIVE ASST
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
MOHAVE COUNTY
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
101 E BEALE ST STE A
KINGMAN AZ 86401-5808
928 753-3788/928 753-1665 (FAX)
mohavece@cals.arizona.edu**

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, James A. Christenson, Director, Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, The University of Arizona. The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation in its programs and activities.