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Features

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Pot, Water Thyself!

Jessie Keith



Sub-irrigation is a marvel. When buying a self-watering pot, one gets more than a pretty planter with an ingenious water reservoir. The buyer gains more time and happier plants with less labor, long-term costs and worry.

AquaPot from Proven Winners.

Today's smart self-watering pots protect against both over- and under-watering, giving plants just the water they need (important peace of mind for fledgling gardeners). And unlike the daily watering required by most summer containers, they typically require only once-weekly filling, sometimes less. No more withered midsummer hanging baskets, pots of drowning, rotting succulents or daily summer watering!

System Function

How do they work? Customers will ask and smart answers will boost sales. Brand designs vary, but as a rule most self-watering pots have six components:

1. Fill port or tube: Some pots are filled from the top and others from the base, but all require an easy method of filling the reservoir.
2. The pot: The larger the soil volume, the greater the root and plant growth capacity. Some self-waterers have very large reservoirs and smaller pots, so be sure to determine size at purchase time.
3. Reservoir (sometimes with a gauge or water-level indicator): Reservoir size depends on the brand and pot size. Models with water gauges or indicators are recommended because gardeners like to know when it's time to fill again.
4. Wicking system: Clever wicking systems vary between companies, but all help plants draw water upwards into the pot until the reservoir is empty. Most have a wicking inner pot, while others use water-holding fabrics or liners.
5. Internal overflow system: A good internal overflow system keeps pots from becoming saturated with water when the reservoir is filled. Good aeration is as important to roots as good hydration
6. External drain: Most self-waterers have external drains for rapid end-of-season reservoir clearing.

Different companies detail why their pots are best (some have larger fill ports and reservoirs or wicking systems of

different sizes), but all-in-all, most are highly rated and made to last. Choose brands that ensure good air flow or breathability at the root system.

Styles, Sizes and Materials

Big, small, pro, stylish, simple, ceramic, resin or poly … what self-watering pots will attract your customers? As a dedicated home gardener, my needs would decide my choices.

For my summer porch, I'd choose large (18-in. or more), long-lasting, attractive, self-waterers of ceramic or thick resin able to hold plenty of plants for a big visual impact. The benefits would outweigh extra costs. When selecting a hanging basket, a medium-sized, elegant self-watering basket of resin or poly would save me watering time while not being too weighty for my porch rafters or shepherds' hooks. My houseplants would look prettiest in compact ceramic pots. Chic styles and colors would be welcome!

Each garden-center customer-base is different, so review your purchase history and ask your regulars what they'd buy when considering a new line of self-watering pots.



The Market

There are many manufacturers of quality self-watering containers. A few of the most respected and notable companies are presented here with product details.

TruDrop planter from Crescent Garden.

Algreen Products offers a wide range of practical and attractive polyethylene self-watering containers sure to make an elegant addition to any home garden. The spacious, double-walled pots are made of recycled and sustainable materials, and they're BPA-free and food-safe for herb and vegetable growers. The all-in-one units have a spacious pot, top fill port, an overflow drain and removable drainage plug at the base of the pot's interior. Each is sold with a 10-year manufacturer's warranty.

Some of the most beautiful retail planters are AquaPots by Proven Winners. The original AquaPots Ceramic series are colorful, heavy ceramic pots with high-fire glazes, but several new lightweight (less-costly) options constructed of volcanic ash composite are now offered. AquaPots Lite Legacy Stone pots come in classic formal styles, while the Lite Urban series are chic and streamlined. Another new helpful addition to the family is the economical Lite Classic Insert, which can turn almost any standard pot into an AquaPot!

The AquaPot sub-irrigation system arrives fully assembled and requires watering as little as once a week. The ample water reservoirs are fed by an insert that uses a soil-packed conduit to wick water to plant roots. Water enters the reservoir through a tube, which stands above the soil line. After initially soaking new plantings, fill the reservoir until the overflow channel releases water. Then water weekly or as needed.

Crescent Garden's Trudrop fully integrated self-watering planters are chic, modular and have advanced self-watering inserts, which allow full water absorption to the bottom of the pot. The large, lightweight, polyethylene planters come in many styles and colors and are designed to simplify commercial or home container gardening. The TruDrop Flex model is distinct in that it has removable self-watering inserts and Flex planter covers, otherwise it functions the same as the TruDrop modular unit.

Each double-walled pot has large water reservoir, central water wick, top fill port, overflow channel and convenient

water-level indicator. Gardeners can go a week or more without watering. Products are backed by a 10-year warranty against fading and cracking.

Established in 1946, the EarthPlanter company produces one of the nation's top-selling commercial self-watering pot, but the stylish, heavy-grade pots are also sold at select nurseries and garden centers where big pots are in demand. Each durable plastic container is made to last and arrives fully assembled and ready to use.

EarthPlanters are more costly, but they arrive with a lifetime warranty and their flawless function make them prized by serious home gardeners. The internal wicking system is top-notch and large potting areas allow for impressive container displays. According to internal research, their pots can reduce labor and water costs by up to 80%, while yielding superior plant performance.

Ideal for the arid west, Desert Planters by Equinox have a customer focus similar to EarthPlanters. The large, all-weather, polyethyene planters are more commercially focused with a retail following. They're beautiful, colorful and designed to amplify water retention and absorption with their patented HydraFilter wick.

Small, ceramic-look-alike pots with beautiful glazes and smart lines are the features of RepotMe's Aqua Core planters. Most of their self-watering pots are 6- to 8-in. and ideal for houseplants. They also offer perfect-fit retro macrame hangers for hanging plants.

Their simple self-watering system is composed of a two-part pot with an intricately-designed inner core, which delivers plant hydration over time. Refill using the watering hole at the top of the pot. The American company sells throughout the lower 48 states.

Better Plants

Not surprisingly, well-irrigated plants are healthier, but regular uptake of needed water also gives them stronger defenses. They develop greater leaf cover and root depth, thicker stems and cuticles and more robust chemical defenses, which all help keep pests away. Inversely, wilted plants become weaker and release stress hormones, which attract pests and allow diseases to take hold. Pests are biologically drawn to plant stress hormones because weaker plants are easier prey.

Let these pots do the watering for your customers. New gardeners rarely realize how much watering is required to keep seasonal containers hydrated and skilled gardeners can always learn something new. Self-watering planters make container gardening a greater joy with more perks. Display yours beautifully, with real-time watering details and technical information to boost enthusiasm, and watch them miraculously disappear from your shelves. **GP**

Jessie Keith is a horticulturist, botanist, garden communicator and photographer based in Wilmington, Delaware. She has worked for many green industry clients and enjoys gardening with her daughters, traveling and discovering new green spaces. Learn more at jessiekeith.com.