

Add a Touch of Autumn Splendor to Garden Containers

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This time of year, nature begins to surround us with its striking fall colors. Celebrate the season's change by creating containers that capture the shades of autumn. You can create a new design or freshen an existing container by adding some brightly colored fall blooms.

Fall color schemes generally include assorted hues of orange, yellow, and red. These are welcoming, bold tones that grab one's attention even from a distance. Flowers that do well in fall planters include calendulas, pansies, sedums and asters. Of course, we can't forget mums, which come in an amazing array of colors. Include plants that add decorative foliage such as coral bells, Swiss chard, ornamental kale and cabbage. Their leaves come in different shades of green, deep red and dark purple that will offer a great backdrop to set off the brighter colors in your display. Experiment with different textures and forms. I like incorporating bunches of dried ornamental grasses, leaves that have taken on their fall color together with flowers and gourds to create a noticeable display of fall items.

When designing a container, consider the height and spread of the plants you choose. Spikes and other conspicuous upright plants add vertical interest and are usually the focal point of the container. Ornamental grasses and tall flowering plants work well for adding height to an arrangement. Mounding or spreading plants add fullness and should help show off the vertical centerpiece. Trailing plant varieties that cascade over the edge will soften and anchor the pot to its surroundings. Creating a design using all three types (often called thrillers, fillers and spillers) is the traditional container blueprint; however, containers with just one type of plant work just as well.

For containers that will be viewed from all sides, place the thriller plant or plants in the middle and build out from there. With pots seen just from the front, place the focal plant in the back and build the design forward.

Grouping your containers together by mixing different heights, colors and forms can have a huge, eye-catching impact. It can help make a large, open area such as on a porch, patio or front entrance seem less stark. Placing together several containers with a repeating design pattern can bring a more harmonious feel while containers with contrasting designs and colors

create more of a pop. You can also arrange pots vertically by stacking them into a tower form. Place a smaller pot into the soil of a larger, broader pot. To help secure the pots, place a stick or garden stake through the top pot's drainage hole and push it down into the larger pot's soil. I did this using three different sized pots. I placed my thrillers in the top pot, fillers in the bottom two pots and a few spillers in all three. The effect was amazing giving the corner of the patio an attention-grabbing display.

Due to the short season, for fall containers start with mature plants already in bloom or with large, interesting foliage. Space plants more closely than you would in a spring pot for an instant full effect. Surround your design with pumpkins, decorative gourds or other seasonal odds and ends that you may come across. As we get further into fall, you can easily find straw bales, cornstalks and decorative scarecrows to help put together an autumn theme. For something different, scoop out a pumpkin, put in a drainage hole, then fill with potting soil and plant pansies or mums to create a pumpkin planter. This is a fun activity for kids. Kids can paint the pumpkin planter and put their own creative spin on it.

Whatever you do, have fun and enjoy your fall decorating!