

Classy Containers

POTSCAPING

People have the ability to garden almost anywhere. In my travels, to remote parts of the world, there is a desire to grow plants even where local soils will not support the practice. The locals simply grow them in containers where almost any vessel is found as a suitable pot for that prized plant.

In North America we may be a little more refined in our selection of pots, we give low priority to oil cans and white plastic jugs, however the premise is the same. In the December column 'Year Round Beauty' I outlined the criteria for selecting permanent pots and urns for the garden. However, if you add seasonal displays the criteria changes dramatically for pot selection since the pots will not have to endure the winter; any pot will do. Here lies the opportunity to showcase your gardens personality; gardening in containers allows us to accessorize our gardens.



Pots allow us to grow tender plants that can be brought inside late in the season.

We can develop seasonal interest by showcasing plants in their prime.

We can use containers almost anywhere the urge strikes us, our planting schemes become portable.

Gardeners are constantly looking for new plants, not only trees, shrubs and perennials but also tender exotics. A visit to most garden centers will confirm that, yes, you can buy a Banana plant in Ontario. The dilemma is what to do with the Banana at summer's end as these plants will obviously not survive even a hint of frost. They either become disposable at the end of the season or move into our homes where they make accommodating house guests given the right conditions.

Gardening is all about seasons and nowhere is that more evident than in Potscaping. As plants in containers fill in they can be moved into positions of prominence in the garden or as they fall out of favour and need a rest they can be relegated to that spot beside the garage. The portability of planting schemes allows you to dress the front entrance for the summer party or to fill the patio with colour for the family barbecue.

In developing successful pot combinations there are a few points to consider to ensure success. Realizing that the smaller the pot the more frequently it will need water, it is important to use the right soil. Professional mixes are available at most garden centres; these mixes are formulated specifically for container growing and are used by all commercial greenhouse growers. These soils have the ability to quickly absorb moisture yet at the same time provide sufficient drainage and aeration that does not suffocate the plant roots. These soils will remain loose and breathable for the plant throughout the growing season.

Large pots, those of one gallon and above are ideal, since they will not dry out as fast and allow for plant growth. That said, small pots can add detail to the gardenscape. Cactus, succulents and other drought tolerant plants actually prefer the warm hot dry days of summer and detest the fussiness of frequent watering and feeding.



When adding plants to pots, break the rules, the red geraniums and the spike are passé, the trademark of the conservative, non adventurous gardener. Look for the exotics; add perennials, plant dominant vertical elements off centre in the container, and try adventurous colour combinations. Before planting, place the plants in the container if it is a large planting, this will allow you to determine how full the planting may become and what combinations look good together.

Plants in containers generally need lots of water, the advantage of using a soil mix formulated for containers allows the mix to absorb water quickly. This can be enhanced by leaving a soil lip at the top of the container; two fingers depth should allow sufficient water to percolate down to the roots. However, when the planters have dried to the point of wilting you may have to water them several times. It is always best to let the planters dry out between watering, to the point of wilting.

Potscaping is a little more intensive than traditional gardening since the plants depend on us for all their needs. Watering and feeding are the main requirements; 20-20-20 water soluble fertilizer at the rate of one tablespoon per gallon every week should keep everyone well fed. A little judicious pruning for the belligerent plants may occasionally be required as well as the removal of spent blooms which will help extend flowering time and keep the planter fresh looking.



Develop routines with planters and success is guaranteed, keep the watering can full and place it near the planters as part of the arrangement, keep the fertilizer beside the dish soap as a constant reminder to feed the plants and always remove spent blooms and discoloured leaves and your garden will be dressed like the professional.

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