

Gardening

Height variations, colors jazz up potted gardens

When choosing containers, bigger is always better because large pots hold lots of potting soil and they don't have to be watered every day. The other good news about large containers is you have room to create a stunning collection of plants.



NANCY SZERLAG

When plant shopping, look for leaves varying in size and color to add pizzazz to the designs. Professionals suggest combining

what they term "pillar," "thriller," "filler" and "spiller" plants to make designing a container garden easy.

Pillars are plants that add height to the display, though they may or may not produce flowers. Pillars may be chosen for drama as well as size. In the old days, a spike would suffice, but an updated container design might include a large red-leafed phormium with vibrant spear-shaped leaves or a dramatic, burgundy-leafed canna.

The canna's flowers are a bonus. Small shrubs, such as *Proven Winners'* sambucus "Black Lace," also make good pillars, as do the flowering maple, abutilon. For a more subdued look, tall flowering summer snapdragon, angelonia, provides lacy color as well as height. Ferns also make great pillars for shaded areas.

Thrillers are plants that put the wow in pots. In shaded areas, you might choose bodacious tuberous begonias or fancy-leaf Rex begonias. In full sun, the hot colors of

the variegated-leaf croton fill the bill. Colorful coleus, such as "Sedona" or "Tabasco," put on an incredible show throughout the season. *Proven Winners'* new "Pretty Much Picasso" petunia, with its hot fuchsia blooms framed in lime green, is stunning.

Fillers are added to provide color and texture. Fancy-leaf zonal geraniums, chosen for their vibrant crazy quilt foliage, make great fillers. So do the bright-colored leaves of heucheras. The architectural leaves of scented geraniums give a look of sophistication. Colorful lettuces and red-stemmed Swiss chard add edible color early in the season. Grasses provide stylish texture.

Spillers drape and add movement and texture as well as color. The tiny lime green leaves of lysimachia "Aurea" fit the bill perfectly, as does the silver-leafed dicentra "Silver Falls." Nasturtiums, too often overlooked, make colorful spillers, as do the lovely fan flowers, scaevola, with their delicate flowers in lilac, pink or white.

When selecting plants, remember, spillers may be thrillers and fillers may become spillers. "Pretty Much Picasso," with its spreading growth habit, is both a thriller and a spiller. It makes a dynamite hanging basket when paired with dark purple verbena and lime green helichrysum. Hung high, it doesn't need a pillar.

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