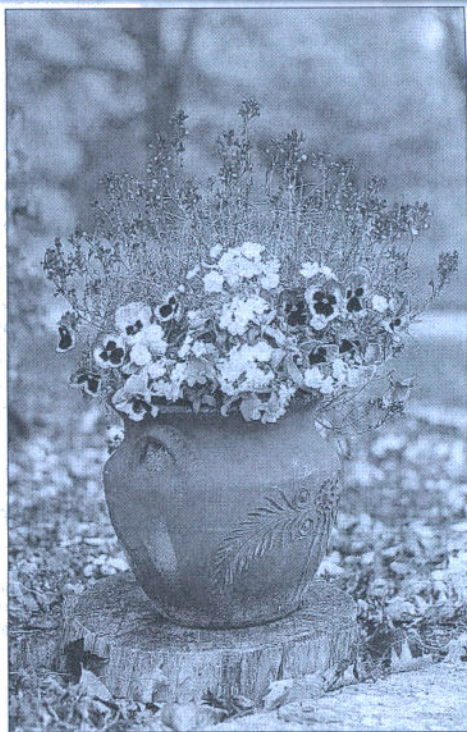




THE BRILLIANT ORANGE FLOWERS of a New Guinea impatiens ("Celebration Bonfire Orange") stand out against Heuchera "Harvest Burgundy" and "Exotic Charm" Nephthytis, as the silver leaves of Dichondra "Silver Falls" drape down.



WHITE PANSIES, Erysimum "Citrona Yellow" and Spilanthes "Peek-a-Boo" surround a tall stand of Pennisetum glaucum "Purple Majesty" ornamental millet. This container garden is well-suited to full sun.



THE FRAGRANT LINARIA "ENCHANTMENT" has magenta and golden flowers that look like tiny snapdragons. They are surrounded by a buttercream-colored phlox and "Matrix Surprise" pansies, which thrive in autumn's cool weather.

Falling For Container Gardens

By **DEBORAH HORNBLow**
Special to The Courant

This season, "mum" is not the word. While chrysanthemums are the quintessential autumn planting, garden enthusiasts have many less predictable choices when it comes to refreshing their container pots for a new season.

"Fall is a great time to experiment with texture and color in your container gardens," says Bill Calkins, spokesperson for Simply Beautiful. "While mums and asters can be spectacular and classic in a fall container garden, there are lots of other choices that will last well beyond the first frost."

Among his top picks for plantings in New England: purple baron millet, ornamental peppers including "Black Pearl," "Sangria," "Purple Flash" and "Calico," Matrix pansies, "Blue Dart" juncus, and "Henna" and "Dark Chocolate" coleuses.

At Moscarillo's Garden Shoppe in West Hartford, "We have cabbage and kale," says nursery manager Gordon Kenneson. ("The newer varieties are edible," he says, but once you've used them as ornamentals, they won't be good for eating.)

Kenneson also suggests juncus, pansies, reed grass, dusty miller, licorice plant, lavender and other herbs.

"Customers come in to buy the plants, or they can bring in their containers," Kenneson says. Moscarillo's staffer Sue Stacy creates container plant combos for store patrons. Prices average about \$10 a pot, depending on the size of the container. (The price is in addition to the cost of the plants used to fill the vessel.)

When selecting plants, "Try combining different heights and forms, or go simple and pot a single dramatic plant in a beautiful container," says Calkins.

Stacy also takes into account the color of the pots and the color of the house or area where the container will be placed.

Caring for fall containers mostly means watering. "In the fall, you'll want to continue watering your container gardens," says Calkins. "However, you should stop fertilizing containers with perennials about six to eight weeks before the first frost date is predicted for your

area. You don't want to encourage new growth, which is tender and won't survive cold temperatures. [It] could even weaken or kill your plant."

If you do put perennials in pots and want to winter them over, move the plants into the ground before it hardens. "You can plant perennials in garden beds until the ground freezes," says Calkins. "Be sure to water well after planting, just like you'd do in spring. The main concern, especially up north, is that the ground will 'heave' as it freezes and thaws. This can actually push plants that have not established out of the soil. So try to get your plants in the ground at the first sign of freezing so they get established."

For inspired ideas for autumn container pot combos, we turned to Ball Horticultural Co. for a photo gallery of fall plantings.



THIS TALL, SLENDER CONTAINER combines three plants in shades of purple — "Purple Majesty" ornamental millet, Iresine "Purple Lady" and Alternanthera "Purple Knight" — accented with cascades of Thunbergia known as "Susie Orange with Eye" trailing down the sides. Thunbergia can grow to lengths of six to eight feet, and if it were planted against a trellis, it would be able to climb as well as trail downward.



THIS CHEERFUL COMBINATION mixes "Voltage Yellow" osteospermum, "Cabaret Red" Calibrochoa and "Blue Dart" Juncus.