

plant them and forget them
10 EASY PERENNIALS
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1 Fill your container half to two-thirds full with slightly damp potting mix before adding fertilizer.



2 It's a lot easier to test a couple of different arrangements before you slip the plants out of their plastic pots.

planting the perfect pot

Plants are forgiving. You probably could just jam them in a pot with a bag of so-so potting mix, and chances are they'd be fine. But if you're going to the trouble of planting up a pot, you want it to look spectacular, not just pretty good. After all, as the saying goes, "Anything worth doing is worth doing well!" Here are four easy steps for getting the pot ready, arranging the plants and settling them in for a gorgeous season. And at right you'll find the plan and plant list for this flowery container.

1 FILL 'ER UP First you need a slightly moist soil-less potting mix. You don't want it soaking wet, but it should feel damp. A new bag of potting mix usually already has some moisture in it and it's ready to use. But if it's dry, pour some water into the bag itself, squeeze it around and let it sit for a few hours until the water is absorbed. Or scoop the mix into a bucket or tub and add water slowly, stirring until all the mix is evenly moist.

With the mix moist, start filling your container — I'm using an empty nursery pot above. If you

can lift it, tap the pot on the table a couple of times as you fill it to settle the mix. If your mix doesn't come with fertilizer already mixed in, and you'd like to add some, sprinkle in a tablespoon or less of slow-release Osmocote® 14-14-14 when the container is half to two-thirds full. (Having fertilizer down in the mix means roots can access it quickly.) Then finish filling the container to an inch or two below the rim and tap the pot again.

2 LOOK AT THE OPTIONS Before you pull any plants out of their plastic pots, arrange them a couple of ways in the container to see how they look best. Keep your vantage point in mind. For example, the container above will only be seen from one direction, so I put the tallest plant, the geranium, at the back with shorter or trailing plants in the front. Make sure the tops of the plastic pots are all at the same level as you test different arrangements — when plants are settled into the container, their heights should stay the same in relation to each other. (Of course, don't forget that they'll grow — especially annuals!)

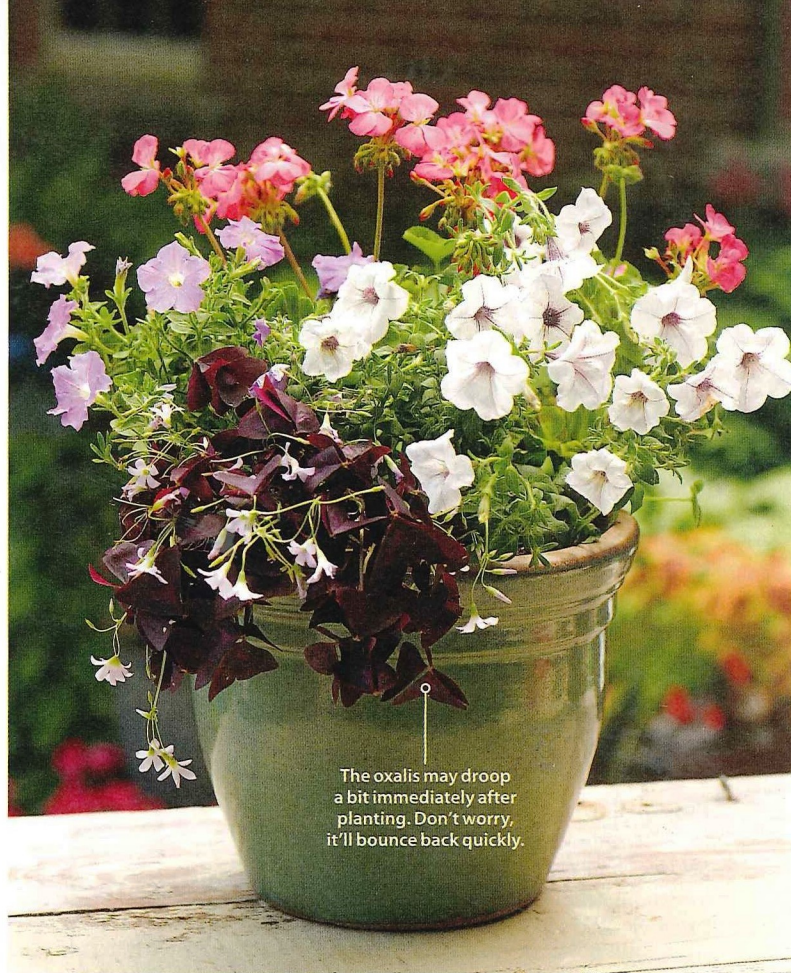
3 WRAP IT UP When you've decided which plant goes where, it's time to get them into the mix! First, remove the plants from their plastic pots. Squeeze the pot gently or, with your



With your fingers, gently tease the roots out to keep them from circling.



Angle a plant so that it spills over the edge.



The oxalis may droop a bit immediately after planting. Don't worry, it'll bounce back quickly.

fingers on either side of the crown, turn the pot upside down and tap the rim against a table to get the plant to slide out. Tease the roots out gently, especially if they're circling in the pot. In photo 3 I'm using my fingers to comb out the root ends. That'll get the roots growing out, not around, leading to a healthier plant.

4 SQUEEZE 'EM IN Packing plants tightly into a container will give you the rich, full look you're going for. But to fit all those plants into a small space, you may need to squeeze the root balls. You can squeeze them between your hands or set the root ball on the table and gently press down on it. Just be careful not to break roots away from the crown.

If you want a plant to spill nicely over the edge of the container, tilt it to one side slightly as you work, making sure the root ball is entirely covered with mix when you're done. Even plants that aren't really trailers, like the burgundy oxalis in photo 4, can soften the edge of the pot when planted this way.

Once all the plants are in, water everything well, add a little extra soil if it has settled and exposed roots, and you're set for the summer! □

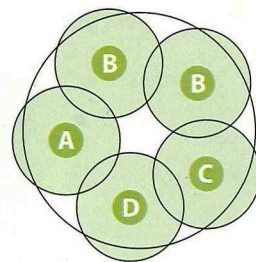
— Deborah Gruca

BLOOM LIKE CRAZY

There's color, color everywhere with this rich mix of pinks, whites, purples and burgundies. And you can keep some of that color going all year round — oxalis makes a good house plant, too. In fact, it's perfect for this use, as it almost always looks its best after it spends a summer outdoors. You may find that it looks a little rough after a winter inside (and also after you first plant it in the container), but it'll cheer up in no time when you move it back outside with its friends.

Tips for care

- Full sun to part shade
- Fertilize every time you water with ¼-strength liquid fertilizer



Container is 12 in. in diameter

Code	Plant Name	No. to Plant
A	Petunia <i>Petunia Easy Wave™ Mystic Pink</i>	1
B	Zonal geranium <i>Pelargonium 'Designer Hot Pink'</i>	2
C	Petunia <i>Petunia Tidal Wave™ Silver</i>	1
D	Oxalis <i>Oxalis triangularis</i>	1