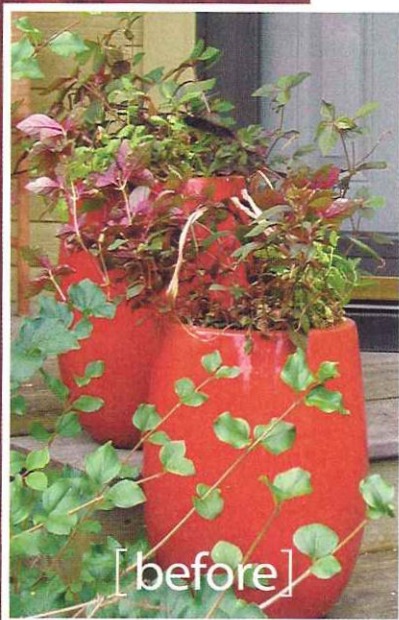




# container revivals

Even containers need a makeover sometimes. Let us show you how to take your containers from tired, depressed and dismal to revived, refreshed and dazzling! Here are three great examples.



Shiny, smooth-surfaced resin containers are easy to wipe clean if they get spattered with mud or grass clippings.

## ZEN ENTRY



These two red containers were supposed to greet people by this front door with an unusual palette of burgundy iresine and purple fountain grass mixed with purple-blue petunias. But when we encountered them, they were in rough shape, with only the iresine still alive. However, with some TLC and a redesigned planting scheme, they revived to form an eye-catching focal point. Let us walk you through this transformation, sharing our tips with you along the way!

**THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM** At first glance, things didn't look good. We knew that the original planting would have benefited from a little more sun. But instead of just looking straggly and refusing to bloom, many of these plants were actually dead. A little investigating revealed that these containers had rubber plugs in the drainage holes that hadn't been removed, so the soil was very wet. Some containers are sold that way, allowing you to use them both as traditional containers and as water gardens. Be sure to tip containers over and check — most nonaquatic plants can't survive in continually wet soil, so you need to be sure the drainage holes are open.

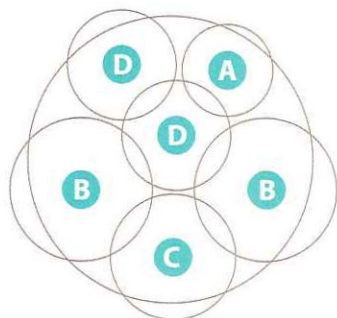
Sometimes you need to start over in a situation like this. But before you do, let the containers drain for a few days. Here, the iresine revived as the soil dried out, so we kept it in the containers as a starting point!

**DRAMATIC DESIGN** While the iresine certainly deserved a second chance after its rough start, the dark color didn't stand out much against the rich red of the containers. Red impatiens would have echoed the color

of the containers. But these salmon ones still pick up the warm tones while adding a brighter color against the dark iresine. Chartreuse sedge adds a light, wispy touch against the strong shape of the containers. With those in place, the containers looked better, but they still needed a tall accent. Say hello to the big leaves and strong architectural shape of Amazon elephant ear! These big, exotic leaves would look a little out of place in a pastel-colored, cottage-garden-inspired container, but in these bold red pots, they make the perfect finishing touch.

**ENJOY THE SUMMER** Once the overhaul was done, these containers were easy to care for. We had to pinch the iresine back a few times, going 4 or 5 in. up the stems and pinching back right above a set of leaves. And we had to pay attention to the amount of light the containers got. Although these plants are all shade-lovers, the leaf color on the iresine is richer, and impatiens bloom better when they get a bit of sun. That doesn't always mean a complete change of location, though. In this case, just moving the containers away from the house out to the edge of the steps gave them a couple of hours of gentle morning sun. After that, they welcomed guests at the front door all summer with color and charm!

**tip** Amazon elephant ear doesn't develop the huge tubers that some kinds do. That makes it an easier option to tuck into an established container without damaging other plants' roots.

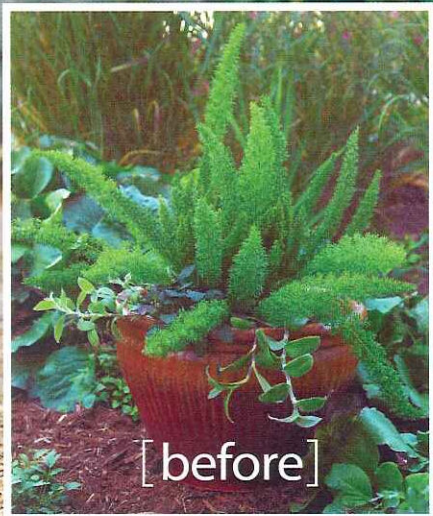


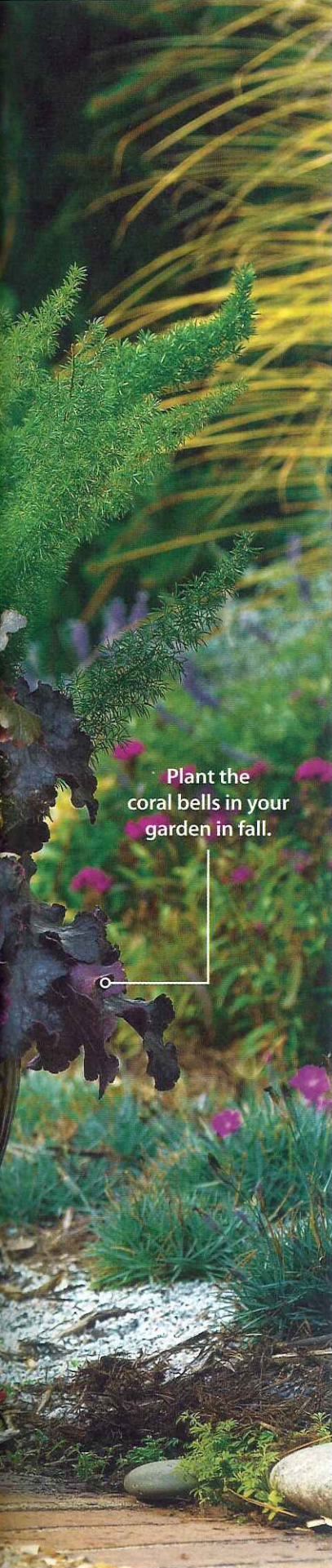
### PLANT LIST (number to plant per container)

- A Amazon elephant ear *Alocasia xamazonica* 'Polly' (1)
  - B Iresine *Iresine* 'Purple Lady' (2)
  - C Sedge *Carex trifida* 'Rekohu Sunrise' (1)
  - ★ D Impatiens *Impatiens* Super Elfin® Salmon (2)
- Containers are 10 in. in diameter

Fishing line tied around the fern keeps the arching stems more upright.

Prop begonia stems up with thin green bamboo stakes so the flowers stay up where you can see them.





Plant the coral bells in your garden in fall.

PHOTO: Brent Isenberger (before)

## A FERN FOUNDATION



In early spring, this container seemed like a great idea. It was supposed to be all about texture, with a bristly foxtail fern, fuzzy white velvet tradescantia and glossy burgundy bugleweed. But by June, it just wasn't going anywhere. Although the foxtail fern was gorgeous, the surrounding plants had either given up or never really taken off at all. They drooped around the edge of the container, looking like they were being swallowed by the fern. There wasn't very much color, and this whole combination was actually just completely forgettable.

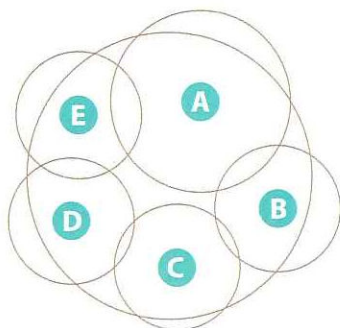
With a bit of careful midseason shopping and the help of some hefty foliage plants, we perked this container up so much that it was beautiful for the rest of the season. Let's take a look at how we did it.

**SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP** It's easy to find gorgeous container plants in spring, but it's a little more challenging in midsummer. Keep looking, though — you'll be surprised at what you can find. And keep an open mind: You might not automatically think of hardy perennials like the coral bells here as container plants. But a lot of perennials have gorgeous foliage. They get off to a slower start than most annuals or tropicals, so they might have looked wimpy when you were shopping in spring. By midsummer, they'll be big and lush. Try to find good-sized plants, too. At this point in the summer, you want instant impact, with no waiting for things to catch up. And don't forget to "shop" in your own garden. This Swedish ivy was in a smaller container where it was crowding out companion plants. Here, with some healthy competition, it's a great team player.

**TEST NEW LOOKS** When you get your shopping finds home, you'll need to do a little arranging. Remove the plants you're not going to keep in the makeover container. Then set the new ones, still in their pots, in the container to see how they look together. You'll adjust the heights as you plant, of course, but you'll still be able to see how things look together. It took us several tries before we came up with the pleasing combination here. Tall, showy plants like hibiscus overshadowed the fern, but we found that smaller plants with subtle colors made it shine. These peachy orange begonia flowers are bright, but they're not so huge or intense that they overwhelm the container. Warm red-and-chartreuse coleus foliage is a nice link between the flowers and the Swedish ivy. And the dark leaves of the coral bells add some depth to the bright green leaves of the other plants.

**TUCK THEM IN** Water the main container and all the new plants the day before you transplant to help minimize root damage. Once it's planted, give it another good drink to remove air pockets in the soil. You may want to set the container in a shady place for a day or two while all the plants get adjusted. Then sit back and enjoy!


**tip** Want to plant the coral bells in your garden? Lift it from the container and plant it several weeks before a hard frost, to give it time to settle in. Add 3 or 4 in. of mulch after a hard freeze to keep the plant roots from frost heaving.



### PLANT LIST (number to plant)

- A Foxtail fern *Asparagus densiflorus 'Myersii'* (1)
- ★ B Coral bells *Heuchera Dolce™ Licorice* (1)
- C Swedish ivy *Plectranthus madagascariensis* (1)
- ★ D Coleus *Solenostemon 'Royal Glissade'* (1)
- E Tuberous begonia *Begonia Nonstop® Rose* (1)

Container is 22 in. in diameter



Dwarf fountain grass, like the other plants in this container, isn't tasty to most deer, making it a good choice in a deer-prone garden.

Plectranthus grows quickly, so pinch it back as needed to help it maintain a tidy shape.

Want to dry a few strawflower blooms? Cut them when the petals are just beginning to open, and hang them upside down in a warm, dry, dark place for a week or two.



## SUNNY WELCOME

When you look at this container in the “before” photo, there’s nothing welcoming about it. Sure, the strawflowers are perky and sunny, and the petunia is blooming nicely. But they look like they don’t belong together. So we split them up!

**IN GOOD SHAPE** The first thing you notice about the “before” photo is the gap in the center. Earlier in the summer, a lobelia filled in that spot. But after it conked out, the draping petunia and the stiff, upright strawflower grew away from each other, leaving a big hole between them. After moving the petunia to another container, we decided the strawflower needed companions that shared its sturdy, upright shape. They add bulk behind and around the strawflower, making the whole planting seem more cohesive. Trailing plectranthus keeps the group from seeming too stiff. But in a short container like this, too many trailing plants would hide too much of the pot. And we wanted the container visible to give the plants some context. When you can’t see the container, a planting like this can end up looking a little messy.

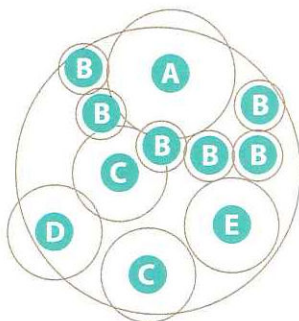
Although upright plants fill in around the strawflower well, we also wanted some variety. Celosia’s spiky plumes add a nice shape contrast to the rounded strawflowers, while the grass at the back offers a wispy texture.

And speaking of foliage, this container doesn’t owe all its colorful charm to flowers. Boldly marked geranium leaves pick up the warm rust tones of the celosia and the container, while the plectranthus echoes the lemon yellow strawflowers.

**MAKING THE CUT** How do you go about taking a container planting apart, anyway? A soil knife with a serrated edge came in handy to separate the root balls of the petunias and strawflowers, while still keeping a chunk of soil with each plant. (Of course, if you’re just going to throw away the plants you’re removing, it’s OK to pull them out. But wiggle them loose gently so you don’t pull lots of soil away from roots of the plants you want to keep.)

With the petunia out of the way, we took the new additions out of their nursery containers to see if they fit in the hole that was left. It’s especially important to check the fit if you’re doing a container makeover in midsummer, because you’ll probably be working with good-sized plants like these. They didn’t fit, so we gently shook off some extra soil to make the root balls smaller, then we pressed them into flatter shapes to slip them into the container. You can do this with your hands, or even by putting the root ball down on the ground and stepping on it—just remember to take care, because you don’t want to break the rootball and crown apart. This container doesn’t need a lot of water, as these plants are all pretty drought-tolerant. But give them a thorough soaking when you settle them in, to be sure they’re off to a good start.

**tip** When you water your strawflowers, keep the water off the petals — the flowers close up when water hits them, and they may even rot.



### PLANT LIST (number to plant)

- A Dwarf fountain grass *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln' (1)
- ★ B Celosia *Celosia* 'Fresh Look Mix' (6)
- C Strawflower *Xerochrysum bracteata* Sundaze® Golden Beauty (2)
- D Plectranthus *Plectranthus ciliatus* 'Troy's Gold' (1)
- ★ E Geranium *Pelargonium* 'Vancouver Centennial' (1)

Container is 20 in. in diameter