

A flower in every pot

BY MARTY ROSS
Universal Uclick

It's time to cook up some new recipes for your flowerpots. This year, march right past the red geraniums at the garden shop and pick up something you've never tried before.

"Some of my favorite combinations are things I just experimented with," says Ron Walder, a graphic designer who works with Proven Winners (a retail line of annuals, perennials and shrubs), to come up with fun, elegant and unexpected combinations for flower pots and gardens. Walder doesn't have a background in garden design, but it turns out that graphic design concepts are entirely appropriate in flowerpots of all sizes and styles.

"I don't get hung up on a recipe" for plant combinations, says Walder, an enthusiastic gardener with a keen eye for color and texture. The standard formula of a tall, spiky green plant, a medium-height flowering plant, and a trailing foliage plant in every pot is a little too limiting, he says. He might fill a stylish pot with specimens of a single dashing flower, and set it next to a pot full of a different, complementary plant. He tried this with pink hydrangeas and deep burgundy sweet-potato vine, and

the result is a striking sculptural arrangement with a lot of texture, depth and visual drama.

Some of Walder's favorite combinations are foliage-only pots, overflowing with lively ornamental grasses or ruffled coleus as richly patterned as an Oriental carpet. He frequently

uses exuberant sweet-potato vine to accent both foliage and flower combinations, and he willingly plants shrubs and perennials — with all their substance and sophistication — in flowerpots.

David Pippin, a garden and floral designer in Richmond, Va., says flowerpots are a gardener's chance to be playful. Some of his pots, in fact, are not pots at all. "I love to see containers that weren't originally designed to be containers," he says. One of his favorite examples is an old pair of work boots he discovered in a friend's garden, planted with a little trailing sedum.

"She just took her husband's old boots, unlaced them and pulled the tongue way out, and planted the sedum in there," he says. "She could have planted the sedum right in the garden, but this is better — the boots have become part of the landscape."

Such containers are not appropriate for every situation, Pippin admits, but it's important to experiment even if whimsy is not your style. Trying new plants and new combinations doesn't just refresh the look of your pots, it also helps you experience your garden with fresh eyes.

Small containers of all kinds are as intriguing as the knickknacks on a tabletop or a mantle, Pippin says. Sedums and succulents, cactus, thyme, ground-covers, miniature hostas and tiny-leaf ivies will thrive in pots no bigger than a teacup: they will amuse you all summer long. Arrange them — and rearrange them — on a patio table or on top of a low garden wall.

Pippin also likes to grow shrubs in large pots. Any tree or shrub in a one- to three-gallon pot at a garden shop is likely to remain in scale with a flowerpot in your garden for at least two years, Pippin says, and can then be planted in the ground when it outgrows the pot.

Walder especially likes columnar shrubs in pots. He plants annual flowers around the base of the shrubs to dress them up and add a little color and excitement.

If you love the wild abandon



of cottage gardens, you will probably be inclined to mix all sorts of colors together in pots, but Walder prefers to limit his palette. For a cool-color design, he tried planting plum, lavender, lilac and pink calibrachoa in an urn; you could do the same thing with red and orange hues for a hot-hued pot, adding a bit of yellow for brightness. “It really creates a tapestry feel” when you use plants of only one species, he says.

While you’re experimenting with plants, try moving your pots to new locations in the garden every year, too, Pippin suggests, and rearranging the way you stage your pots on the porch or patio. “It’s just like indoors — just because your sofa has been in the same place for 20 years, that doesn’t mean it has to live there,” he says. “Move your containers around — if it’s always the same plants, in the same pots, it’s no longer exciting. Do something different.”

Pots and plants

If you’re ready to experiment with

plants and pots this year, here are some ideas from Ron Walder, who works with Proven Winners (www.provenwinners.com), and David Pippin, a flower arranger and garden designer (www.davidpippin.biz):

- Have fun with foliage. Walder loves colorful coleus, sweet-potato vines and the ornamental grasses in the Proven Winners Graceful Grasses line, especially the dramatic tall papyrus, King Tut, which grows to five feet or more.
- In a shady spot, Pippin suggests trying hostas in pots. Grow them with ferns.
- White flowers have a sophisticated look and combine with other colors wonderfully, Walder says.
- Lettuce, cherry tomatoes and many other food plants look terrific in pots, Pippin says. This year he plans to plant lettuce in a stone trough. Parsley and other herbs thrive in pots, too, he says.
- If you like combinations but you’re not sure what plants go together, try two or three colors of the same plant.
- Plants in pots need lots of fertilizer to grow and bloom. You can add slow-release fertilizer to the soil when you plant. Walder also fertilizes his pots every other week with a water-soluble fertilizer. Pippin also uses a water-soluble fertilizer, “weekly, weakly,” he says — once a week with a diluted solution of fertilizer. You can mix it in a watering can.



PROVEN WINNERS

SOPHISTICATED COMBO: Blue-glazed pots around a pool echo the color of the cushions and pool tiles. Below left, a toffee-glazed pot sits beside a garden gate holding purple fountain grass, Colorblaze Sedona coleus and Superbells peach-tone calibrachoa. Right, stenciled terra cotta pots bear a house number and contain ferns, groundcovers and small succulents.



PROVEN WINNERS



MARTY BOSS

Don't be afraid to experiment with colors and combinations



PROVEN WINNERS

FLOWERY WELCOME: Spiky, purple Angelface blue angelonia bursts out of the larger creamy glazed pot, surrounded by Intensia Orchid Blast phlox and Whirlwind blue scaevola. Superbells pink calibrachoa flourishes in the smaller pot.



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TRANSFORMED: Handbag and shoe make cozy homes for small sedums. For drainage, make sure to remove the purse liner and add holes to the sole with a nail.