

Pots are full of potential for fall plants

The season's hues and vibrancy can be easily captured in containers.

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Fall is a season of bounty: It's time to stuff your flowerpots.

Lush containers capture the colors and the spirit of fall. Summer's zinnias and cosmos may still be blooming, but autumn arrives with a fresh, exciting palette, and showy pots and window boxes full of the season's hues put the focus up close – on a porch or patio where you can enjoy the rich and dramatic colors as you come and go about your day.

Garden shops are ready for you with pansies in every hue, and bright asters and chrysanthemums, absolutely covered with buds, are about to steal the show from the summer garden.

"I love the idea of taking the plants and colors in the landscape and putting them in a pot – isolating them in a container. It's pretty cool," says Andrea Pellumbi, who works in the custom container department at Al's Garden Center in Portland, Ore., putting together plant combinations for flowerpots for her customers.

Pellumbi favors mixed plantings, and in the fall, when temperatures cool off and the days grow shorter, she doesn't hesitate to bend the rules, mixing sun and shade plants in the same pots.

"I tell customers to go for it, to shop the whole green-

house," she says. Sunlight is less intense in the fall, and plants that normally prefer shade should be fine in a sunny spot. Don't skimp, she says. "We are stuffers. We want these pots to look good right now."

Joan Mazat, manager of potted plants for Ball Horticultural in Chicago, also recommends yielding to exuberance.

In cold-weather climates, containers do not have the chance to fill out as much as summer pots do, she says, so overly cozy planting isn't really a problem. Maintenance is easy in the fall, she says: Plants will not need as much water as they do on hot summer days, and a little fertilizer at planting time should be enough to get plants through the whole season.

Designers who specialize in containers are leading a trend toward putting perennials or shrubs or both in pots, adding herbs and touches of frilly lettuces or other seasonal vegetables, and using annual flowers as accents.

Fall is an especially good time to combine vegetables and herbs in pots, says Sonia Uytterhoeven, who is in charge of home gardening programs at the New York Botanical Garden. "The easiest thing to do is to grow a mesclun mix or arugula, or Asian greens," she says. "They don't take

up a lot of space," and you can harvest the greens for a couple of months at least. Lettuce, kale, and herbs, which are widely available

at garden shops in the fall, dress up flowerpots with their colors and textures. "It's a nice reminder for people that vegetables come in different colors," she says. She makes room among the greens for violas and calendulas, both edible flowers that flourish in cooler fall temperatures.

"You can also grow a beet with purple foliage, or mix red and green lettuces, or mustard, which comes in a beautiful red color," Uytterhoeven says. "It mimics what's happening with fall foliage, so it looks very beautiful."

Gardeners are always gung-ho about planting flowerpots in the spring, but

they sometimes overlook opportunities in the fall, says Deby Barnhart at Cornell Farm, also in Portland. A pot of mums by the front door looks good, but it doesn't really go very far. "The front door is just a place to start," she says. Don't forget about the view from the kitchen window, she says, where a pot might look sculpturally dramatic, or along the front walk, on the deck, or by a garden bench, where you'll enjoy them every day.

Barnhart likes to mix bright pansies with garden vegetables and herbs, or or-

namental grasses with plants with golden flowers or foliage, and finds what she calls "zones of warmth" in the garden where pots will hold up through light frosts and fall storms.

Pellumbi suggests staging pots together to create a scene as rich as the season. "I talk with customers about an anchor container," she says. The anchor is a large pot, full of foliage plants and emphasizing texture. She packs it full of plants with striking variegation or splashes of silver or gold. "Putting the combinations together is just like painting a painting," she says. She then adds smaller pots around the anchor, echoing the theme of the anchor pot, the whole inspired by nature's fall hues. "I'm a texture freak," she says.

"We can use millet, asters, mums, and pansies, and it's amazing what you can do." Just look around you at nature – and then go take a good look around a garden shop, too. You'll be pleased by what you see when you open your eyes to the beauty of the season.





CHRIS BROWN PHOTOGRAPHY

Small pots are simple to plant in, and easy to move around the garden - or wherever the party takes you.