

Pretty in pots: If it grows in the ground, it will grow in a container

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Chris Brown Photography Pretty Much Picasso. Courtesy Photo

You can create an entire landscape from filling pots with soil, flowers and foliage plants.

Nearly anything that grows in the ground will grow in a container --- if it's the right size, the soil mix is good and plants receive the right amount of nutrients and water. There are so many styles and sizes of containers and so many plant combinations possible, that options are limitless, or at the very least, limited only by imagination.

With so many garden projects on my things-to-do list, I got a late start on planting my pots. I also decided not to go overboard this year with too many pots. I remind myself of this fact as daily, I schlep water to six or seven hanging baskets, three large window boxes, a multitude of pots, potted peppers, cherry tomatoes and one of those hanging tomato things, as well as container-grown roses, evergreens and other odds-and-ends plants scattered around my yard.

Each year, I work from a theme to create nice-looking plant combinations. In a sense, it's like preparing a recipe. I select the pots I want to fill, choose a color scheme and style, then decide on plants. This year it's a cottage theme with lots of colorful annuals in window boxes and large pots planted in shades of pink and white with feathery purple fountain grass for height and trailing vines spilling over the pot brim.

Among my favorite finds this year is the Proven Winners' "Pretty Much Picasso," an unusual and striking petunia that is vibrant violet purple edged in lime green. Another one is the Potunia Cappuccino petunia, a creamy chocolate petunia with purplish-chocolate veining that looks great

against purple trailing plants. There's also Shock Wave "Blue Denim," a surprisingly blue-looking color-washed purple petunia.

Container gardening, essentially, is creating an environment for plants that mimics real garden conditions. The key to success is giving plants what they need to survive and thrive.

First, choose the right size pot. Think of it as a Goldilocks kind of thing --- "this one is too large, that one is too small." It's a critical choice because a too-small pot will constrict root growth and keep roots from spreading and taking in nutrients and oxygen in the soil. If the pot is too large and the plant is a slow grower, it may have trouble spreading out; conversely, if the plant is a fast grower, it could put out more foliage and less flowers.

In addition to girth, the depth of a pot is a factor. Some plants are shallowly rooted and perform best in shallow pots, while plants with long tap roots need deeper pots. Make sure all of your containers have drainage holes, even if you have to drill them yourself. Terra cotta pots need more frequent waterings because the material is porous; plastic and resin pots are not porous, but will still require daily waterings. Hanging pots may need watered several times each day, particularly when the weather turns hot, dry and breezy.

And it's never too late to take advantage of those plant sales to pot up a few more pretties!

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