



Well Contained

The right pot can enhance the appearance of any plant and visa versa and, where space is limited, it is also one of the easiest ways to create a stunning instant garden

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2

With gardens becoming more compact, even the smallest patio or balcony can be transformed with a pot filled with colourful flowers, sexy succulents or delicious fruits and vegetables. Container gardening can quickly beautify any area of your garden without too much cost or upheaval. The mobility of them also makes it very easy to rearrange and redesign any area of garden at any time of the year.

Choosing a container

Plants can be planted into any number of containers — you are only limited by your imagination. Pots have been a popular choice for many years and come in all

shapes, sizes and materials, such as ceramic, terracotta, aluminium, fibreglass, stone, concrete, tin and plastic.

However, your choice does not have to be restricted to garden pots. Try using wooden wine barrels, old watering cans or even recycled car tyres. It is important to choose a style to complement the surrounding décor. Take cues from the architecture of the home and style of the garden.

For a contemporary look, choose a container with a simplistic shape in sleek metal or smooth concrete then select a plant with interesting foliage for a striking display. For a more classic, formal style, try terracotta pots with clipped mounds of



3



4

1. A trio of easy-care succulents makes a strong statement against this stone feature wall.

2. Yuccas adapt well to life in a pot, tolerating little water and lots of sun and provide an eye-catching focal point.

3. Get creative. Try mixing plants with colour both in flower and foliage with contrasting textures for an interesting effect.

4. Two large clay pots complement the Agave attenuate and make a bold statement in this entranceway.



5

Buxus sempervirens or standard bay and citrus trees. Several New Zealand native plants such as Astelias and Scleranthus work well in concrete or ceramic pots for an easy-care foliage effect.

Complement or contrast the colour of the pot with the colour of the flowers. A container with a glossy black finish provides a strong contrast to exotic-looking, vivid-coloured blooms. Create a stylish monochromatic effect by planting succulents such as Aeonium 'Schwarzkopf' or Echeveria 'Black Knight' in a simple white ceramic pot. Perfect for sunny, hot courtyard spaces.

Plants for containers

Container gardening lets you grow a huge array of plants from annuals, bulbs, succulents and perennials to tropical and edible plants.

First, it is important to consider the location the pot is placed. Will the pot be in full sun, shade or exposed to coastal winds? Next, choose the right plant for that situation; also think about scale and proportion. Balance the size of the pot with the eventual size of the plant. Very few plants survive long in an overcrowded, restricted container.

From a design perspective, single planting always creates great impact. For example, hydrangeas, pelargoniums, lavender and flax look stunning in a large tub or pot or, for a stylish statement, try using a single specimen with extraordinary foliage such as Cycad revoluta (sago palm) or a dwarf Japanese maple. Nothing looks more elegant than a potted Japanese maple in a secluded courtyard or sheltered entrance way.

If flowers are your thing, try pots filled with gardenias, seasonal bulbs or annuals such as petunias, pansies, begonias, impatiens, salvia, lobelia, verbena and marigolds. These will need to be replaced every season. You can play around with colour to suit your own personal tastes.

For a feminine, romantic touch you can't go past good old-fashioned cream or pink roses. Roses are often easier to care for in pots. Fertilising and dead-heading petals are important tasks for a successful, colourful display for the sunny, sheltered spot in the garden.

If you love cooking and enjoy eating fresh homegrown fruits and vegetables, the good news is many herbs and vegetables are suitable for containers. You can grow basil, mint, lettuce, capsicum, parsley, chives, tomatoes, dwarf fruit trees, strawberries and many more.

How to plant

Container-grown plants provide great appeal. They can remain happy in their pots for many years and you can even take them with you if you move house.

By following a few simple rules, your plants will flourish and provide you with a constant source of pleasure.

- Make sure your pot has holes at the bottom for drainage. This will prevent the roots from sitting in water.
- Add broken crockery, pebbles or gravel at the bottom to help the water move freely out the bottom of the pot and prevent the holes becoming blocked.
- Use pot feet under your pots in winter to raise the pot for additional drainage and place a saucer under the pot to help retain water in summer.
- Use a quality commercial container mix instead of garden soil to fill your pot. In a contained space the right potting soil is essential. Plants require the right blend of minerals, nutrients and slow-release fertilisers to help keep them healthy and happy.
- Leave a 50mm gap from the top of the pot to prevent the soil spilling over when you water.
- Once the plant is in the pot, water it gently using a soft spray nozzle on your hose. Water it until water is coming out of the bottom of the pot.

Container care

Once planted, plants usually require regular attention to keep them looking good. Adhering to a few maintenance tips will ensure your plants continue to impress.

- During the summer, water daily — early morning or late afternoon is best. Plants dry out a lot quicker in pots, so check them regularly and add a layer of mulch on top to help retain moisture. Even in winter, pots and tubs may need watering once a week depending on their individual requirements. Irrigation can be installed and automated to take away the worry of watering if you go away on holidays.
- Feeding is the next essential part of keeping your plants healthy. Maintain regular feeding, especially during the growing season. Apply a top dressing of dry fertiliser or apply a liquid blood-and-bone, which you mix with water.
- Keep the plants groomed. Trim and remove tired-looking and broken leaves. Deadhead spent flowers promptly. Keep an eye out for pests and diseases as these can be more easily controlled if caught early. ■

5. Rocket lettuce grows happily in this planter situated on the deck a short distance from the kitchen.

6. Dwarf green flax has been planted en masse in rectangular planters, creating a simple lush green effect beneath this concrete wall.



6

“Container gardening can quickly beautify any area”