



## COOL SEASON CONTAINERS

The older I get, the more I love fall. As a kid, summer was my season. The mercury in the thermometer just couldn't rise high enough – the hotter it was, the happier I was. I still remember my dad's scowl as I incessantly wished for days of 100 degrees. Now I wish for days with highs in the 70's, relish cool nights when I can sleep with the window open, and grimace when my daughters lobby for heat. I am certain my dad is looking down and smiling.

In autumn, the thoughts of many home-owners turn toward back-to-school events and away from outdoor activities. But there are still many reasons for us to take pleasure in our outdoor spaces: to share the bounty of fresh produce as we picnic with neighbors; to celebrate fall's sporting events with friends; and to celebrate seasonal holidays with family.

Adorn your deck or patio for your next get-together with colorful containers. There are plenty of plants that fancy cool temperatures at your local garden center. A few are synonymous with fall color, but there are many others typically chosen for spring containers but often overlooked

for fall containers.

### Alyssum

Alyssum gets its name from the Greek words *a* meaning "not" and *lyssa* meaning "madness" and was used as a cure for rage and madness in ancient times. While I am not convinced of its medicinal capabilities, I am impressed with its tiny flowers that are borne in such large quantities the foliage is almost hidden. Create a color echo by planting Easter Bonnet Violet alyssum with Dynasty Pink kale. Add some Algerian ivy to drape over the side of the container.

### Million Bells

Botanically known as Calibrachoa, this bushy, trailing plant with blossoms that resemble miniature petunias is gorgeous rambling over the edge of containers. Million bells flower tirelessly in many appealing colors, but I especially like Superbells Scarlet for fall planting. It is stunning in combination with burgundy-foliaged Phormium or Cordyline.



### Sedge

Leatherleaf sedge (*Carex bucananii*) is the perfect sedge for fall containers. Its unique brown foliage curls at the end of each stem. Use it for the vertical element in smaller plantings or to contribute fine texture to larger plant groupings. It is just as beautiful when combined with the typical fall colors of yellow and orange as it is when it mingles with pinks and lavenders.

### Baby's Breath

Festival Star baby's breath (*Gypsophila*) is a densely branched plant covered with clouds of small white flowers. Utilize this 12 to 18" tall plant to brighten up any container or try it with the large deep lavender flowers of Regal Cheryl or Bold Melissa Chrysanthemums.

### Peek-A-Boo Plant

Also known as the eyeball plant and perfect for Halloween, the unique yellow flowers with dark red centers of peek-a-boo plant (*Strobilanthes*) resemble the eyeballs of an alien creature. Combine it with the dark red blooms of Bravo Chrysanthemum or with the warm orange blossoms of Erica Chrysanthemum. Add leatherleaf sedge for a textural contrast.

## Herbs

Don't forget herbs when designing new containers for fall. Sages offer beautiful soft, fuzzy foliage; thymes contribute fine texture; and they both provide fragrance to container plantings. You can even snip some leaves to use in your favorite recipes.

## Coral Bells

Although normally considered when selecting perennials for partly shaded borders, coral bells (*Heuchera*) are often available in smaller pots at garden centers in fall so they can be tucked into containers where their foliage is a desired addition. Amethyst is a nice variety with silver-overlaid purple leaves; Amber Waves is a newer variety with amber-colored foliage.

## Ornamental Cabbages and Kale

Ornamental cabbages and kale are extremely cold-tolerant holding not only their color, but also their form into winter. Although they look similar to their edible cousins, their gray-green foliage is more decorative highlighted in colors of white, pink, and red. Their color intensifies as temperatures drop and is at its best after the first frosts. Ornamental cabbages and kale are edible but are best used fresh to add color to mixed

salads. When cooked, purple leaves turn brown and white leaves turn brownish-gray.

## Pansies

A fall container just isn't finished unless pansies are included. Available in just about any color, there are pansies for any planting scheme. Plant more of the same varieties used in containers in the garden, too. There are many types that will overwinter in the garden and greet you in the spring with another round of blooms. Plant pansies over bulb plantings and you will be rewarded with spring bouquets in the border.



## Mums

Chrysanthemums have traditionally been a fall favorite. Named for the Greek words *chryso* and *anthos* meaning "gold flower", they are now available in a wide range of colors including white, yellow, gold, bronze, burgundy, red, purple, lavender, and pink. Also available is a variety of flower forms including daisy-like,

pompon, decorative, spider, and more; the decorative type is the most popular. With proper planning you can enjoy mums in bloom from early September to the end of October. Varieties like Dark Triumph (two-tone bronze) and Bravo (burgundy) begin the show in early September; Denise (pastel bronze) and Jolly Cheryl (dark red) continue the performance into early October; and Andrea (mahogany-centered bronze) and Barbie (pink) present the finale until the end of October.

## Gourds

Don't forget to add a gourd or two to containers. Besides giving containers a seasonal flare, they can take the place of a plant, fill in a bare spot, or provide support to floppy stems.

If you are like the older version of me, and delight in the crisp, cool days of fall, don't let the end of summer mean an end to your time outside. Enjoy entertaining friends on your deck or patio decorated with captivating containers filled with cool-season plants. And as my daughters bemoan the end of the dog days of summer, I think about the seasons and circle of life and how my dad must be smiling ... again.