



DRAMATIC PLANTS FOR CONTAINERS

Gardening in containers offers an exciting way to experiment with different plants while bringing life and color to otherwise bland spaces. But how can gardeners create eye-popping containers that will complement a doorstep, patio or special spot in the garden? Include plants that draw the eye by their boldness in color, texture, habit or size.

Annuals generally provide season long flowering so they make great additions to containers, but remember that many perennials and tropical plants can also be used to great effect for their spectacular foliage. Hostas and ornamental grasses are just two examples of perennials that achieve bold structure on their own or combined with flowering plants.

Create sharp contrasts by pairing an airy plant, such as a fern, with a large, round-leaved Hosta. In other words, pair plants that have a difference in leaf texture and size to make a greater impact.

Try using a bold-leafed canna or New England flax as a centerpiece of a mixed container instead of the traditional spike.

Position is slightly off center to make it more interesting.

Single color plantings make a dramatic statement just by their simplicity. An icy composition of whites makes a brilliant display especially if positioned as a focal point in the garden. Varying shades of green planted together seems subtle yet when using different leaf shapes and tones, the effect is dazzling. Herbs such as sage, pineapple mint and thyme make great companions to chartreuse sweet potato vine, variegated ivy and the ruffled leaves of lady 's mantle.

Single specimen plantings are easy to assemble and add a very elegant look to a container. A pot of *Hosta sieboldiana* 'Elegans', a large-leafed, blue-toned *Hosta*, can create a dynamic focal point in a shady corner. To show off an ornate or unusual pot, try a large-leafed Algerian ivy—understated but eye-catching.

Nicotiana sylvestris features huge leaves that often reach two feet in length and a foot in width. Its handsome texture, evident in early summer, is joined in mid-July by unusual down-facing white flowers that are wonderfully fragrant. This plant can eas-

ily stand on its own in a container and is particularly brilliant at night, making it a spectacular choice for a deck or patio that is enjoyed in the evening.



The flowers of *Nicotiana sylvestris* glow in the moonlight.

Experiment with plants that are less known or not typically perceived as container choices. Generally placed in the vegetable patch, Swiss chard makes a gorgeous addition to containers with its wide, crinkled leaves. The variety 'Bright Lights' features brilliant red, golden yellow and orange stems and leaves. It maintains its beauty throughout the season lasting well into fall. Its color is most vibrant in full sun. The wide, rounded leaves of ornamental kale also offer a bold presence in a pot.

Don't forget herbs—fennel and sage are two that have sensational leaves.

A little known member of the *Hibiscus* family is 'Red

Shield', which features plant—it will not survive our burgundy, maple-like foliage on winters—and generally draws branching stems. By the end of attention at the garden center the summer it can reach three to because of its gorgeous leaves four feet in size, so choose a as well as tropical looking container large enough to flowers. Autumn temperatures accommodate its generous build. often change the leaves into a It complements silver foliage delicious red tone.

plants such as *Helichrysum* or dusty miller and pink flowered annuals such as petunias or verbenas.

The velvety leaves of containers that many are best *Tibouchina*, also called Princess suited, due to their tropical looks. flower, have a silvery green cast Varieties with variegated, rich which complements its clear burgundy and bright green purple flowers. A Brazilian leaves take center stage in pot native, *Tibouchina* has become combinations. They can provide more available here as a patio emphasis where needed and are

very easy to grow.

The large, color drenched leaves of coleus go a long way to bring some drama to container plantings. Solid, freckled and mottled leaves in an array of tones from lime to purple to pink are just some of the choices.

New sun-loving varieties allow them to be planted in sun or shade, making them quite versatile.

