

Update containers for fall

With Labor Day weekend behind us, there is no denying it – summer is giving way to fall. It's time to swap bathing suits for backpacks, burgers on the grill for pots of chili, and summer-worn annuals for fresh fall flowers in containers.

Begin by assessing summer plantings. If the color scheme was splendid for summer, but unsuitable for fall, remove everything; if the majority of plants are ragged beyond repair by pruners, everything goes; but if containers are still looking pretty good, consider a bit of editing here and pruning there instead of condemning all plants to the compost bin.

Calibrachoa, commonly called million bells, and alyssum are often-used annuals in summer containers that can be prompted into flushes of fresh flowers with a few snips of the pruners. Marigolds may look a little tattered, but if they still sport plenty of plump buds, they are worth cleaning up. Most marigolds bloom in shades spot-on for fall.

If purple fountain grass or cordyline grew in summer containers, removal of a few brown leaves may be all that is required to get them into fall form.

After the annuals granted another season are primped and pruned, remove plants sentenced to the end of their season with a garden knife. Cutting around these plants may cause some damage to the roots of other plants but less harm than if they are pulled from pots.

Now for the fun part – head to your favorite local garden center and choose your fall favorites. Their benches are packed with the flowers and foliage of autumn.

What would fall containers be without pansies? Choose from varieties with flowers of rich purple, brilliant orange, yellow that glows, or blooms with bi-colors. Don't forget to plant more of the same varieties in the garden, too.

Peek-a-Boo plant (*Strobilanthes*) is a fall favorite. Its unique yellow flowers have dark red centers. Plant it with a dark red-flowering mum in a seasonal dynamic duo.

Ornamental cabbages and kales add coarse, bold texture to fall containers. Their gray-green foliage is highlighted with shades of white, rose and red that deepen with cool temperatures, reaching their peak after the first frost. Ornamental cabbages and kales are extremely cold hardy and remain pretty in containers until Thanksgiving.

Mums are synonymous with autumn. In shades of yellow, gold, burgundy, bronze, red, pink, lavender and purple, there is a variety for every color scheme. Choose a few from early-, mid- and late-season blooming types to keep the deck or patio in mum color from early September to the end of October.

Remember perennials when choosing plants for fall containers. The grass-like leaves of sedges adds fine texture; the bold foliage of coral bells adds rich color; and the leaves of herbs add

fragrance. Leadwort (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*) boasts sparkling blue flowers and brilliant red fall foliage.

Finally, add a few gourds or a small pumpkin. They add seasonal flare while filling bare spots or providing support for floppy stems. And, believe it or not, Halloween is just around the corner!

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