



Plants and Ideas for Spring Containers

Containers are becoming more common as green accents. Hardy annuals are an ideal "spring starts" in local nurseries. jump on spring gardening and feed that late winter need for outdoor flowers. Since the soil in a container warms up faster than the garden it is usually ready to be planted sooner. Portability allows you to pull smaller container gardens into a garage or garden shed during an occasional late cold snap if need be, and their relatively smaller size makes it easy to cover them. Choose good, cold-hardy plants and extra protection is not generally required. The most cold resistant plants are the plants that naturally emerge from the ground in March and April. Daffodils, tulips and hyacinths are always reliable. Bulbs can be forced at home in the refrigerator, timed to plant when you want to biggest show, but that requires planning months ahead. It can also take up valuable real estate in the fridge. Bulbs already in bud or bloom are readily available at local nurseries. Growers continue to offer the new and unusual in an effort to capture gardeners interest and imagination earlier in the season, so keep an eye out for exciting new options. Grape hyacinths and other minor bulbs

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Think outside the box within your containers this year. Plant lettuces with red leaves where you might otherwise use a flowering kale. Swiss chard is another colorful choice with red and yellow stems and 'Baby Butterhead' lettuce makes an exceptional small, round, bright

green accent. Hardy semperivum can be wintered over in a container in protected area and brought out as early as late winter, provided the container itself is winter-proof. Container garden designs are no longer limited to annual flowers. Perennials and biennials as container subjects are one of the newest trends in gardening. One of the most versatile perennials to look for this year is Heuchera, commonly known as coral bells. Many named varieties boast showy flowers and others are grown exclusively for their striking and varied foliage colors.

Combine some of that colorful foliage with bright spring flowers. Heuchera 'Lime Rickey' is striking with Heuchera 'Licorice', 'Creme brulee' or 'Plum Pudding.' Add a little lavender or purple stock and a spill of 'Silver Fog' euphorbia around the edge. Purple cordyline or black pussy willow twigs make a perfect spiked accent in the center. For a more subtle monochrome design, combine silver grass with white primroses, white pansies and white English daisies. Add a few corkscrew willow twigs for accent.

Plant alyssum, violas and stock around a taller Osteospermum. The color scheme in this combination of plants can be monochromatic or a mix, as each comes in white as well as shades of pinks and purples.

For perennial pink flowers, look for Bergenia, Lenten rose, and Pulmonaria varieties. Good blue perennial flowers are Pulmonaria, forget-me-nots and Columbines.

Nice whites are Tiarella and candytuft. Primroses and English

daisies can't be beat for spring color and come in various shades of red, yellow, white and pink. Once finished in the garden, plant them into a permanent spot in the border.

Colorful twigs give a nice vertical effect and may even develop roots in the potting soil. Redtwig dogwood, Japanese kerria and black pussy willow stems add a terrific splash of color. Corkscrew willow adds a whimsical vertical element with its twisty stems. If you discover rooted twigs when you disassemble the container garden, pot them up and grow them on in a protected location for later placement in the shrub border.

Choosing early spring bloomers that also boast a little heat tolerance will give your container garden longer staying power when early summer temps start to rise, but when the heat turns on full blast, just be bold and pull the spring containers apart. Be sure and plant into the garden any perennials you used, and then redesign your container gardens using plants that thrive in the summer heat.

A nice sunny combination features the bright reds and yellows of primroses. Fill a container with primroses in every shade, or combine pink, yellow and cream primroses with purple stock and sweet alyssum.