

## **There are more choices than pansies for spring containers**

It's that time again – time to plant our spring containers. Most exciting of all our seasonal plantings, they deliver badly needed color even if we can't plant in the garden yet. Instead of just filling them full of pansies, let's be more creative this year.

There are plenty of plants perfect for cool weather ready to charm their way on to your cart at your local garden center.

### **Annuals**

Dianthus, commonly known as Sweet William, grows up to 18 inches tall, depending on the variety, blooming in shades of coral, pink, red and white. Diascia, commonly called twinspur, offers a profusion of sweet blooms in shades of coral, lavender, orange, pink and white. Plant dusty miller for its lacy, silvery-gray foliage.

Nemesia boasts charming snapdragon-like flowers in a wide range of colors. The exquisite flowers of Ranunculus are made up of layers upon layers of silky petals. Available in both bold and pastel colors, their flowers look too perfect to be real.

Stock is an old-fashioned favorite with spikes of fragrant flowers in shades of pink, purple, red, yellow and white. Sweet alyssum fills the air with its perfume. Small in stature but substantial in flower power, lavender, purple or white varieties are pretty at container edges.

### **Perennials**

Don't forget about perennials when choosing plants for spring containers. After they have done their seasonal duty, they can be planted in the garden.

Columbine, botanically named *Aquilegia*, grows up to 30 inches tall and flaunts unique long-spurred flowers in both solid and bi-colored shades of blue, pink, purple, red, yellow and white. Enjoy the antics of early arriving hummingbirds as they feast on their nectar.

Hellebores are a natural in spring containers. Their nodding blooms fade so gently, they are attractive for months. Coarse, dark green leaves add foliage interest to containers, too.

Coral bells are planted as fillers in containers for their beautiful foliage. Lamium is an ideal foliage plant to spill over edges.

### **Shrubs**

If a small shrub magically leaps onto your cart and you are unsure where to plant it once you get home, why not put it to work in a spring container while you determine its new permanent position.

What can shout, “Spring has arrived!” more than a forsythia, an azalea or a rhododendron? The branching structure of a Japanese maple adds interest until unfurling foliage contributes color. Even a small evergreen offers height while its needles supply texture and tone.

### **Edibles**

I almost always include lettuce in my spring containers. The coarse texture of its large, luscious leaves contrasts beautifully with spring blooms. Lettuce is available in bright to dark green and light to dark red.

Swiss chard and kale are unexpected but delightful in containers. Cool-season herbs like cilantro, chervil, chives, dill and parsley can also be employed.

### **Bulbs**

Blooming daffodils, tulips and hyacinths add flair to spring containers. To include forced bulbs in spring containers, ‘plant’ an empty 4-inch pot in the container along with the other plants. Place a purchased 4-inch pot of flowering bulbs in the empty pot. When flowers fade, pull out the pot and insert a new one.

### **Sticks**

It can be difficult to find height for containers in spring. Prune a handful of branches with plump, fuzzy catkins from pussy willow bushes. You can also purchase pussy willow branches with catkins dyed lavender, pink and yellow or curly willow at your local garden center. Instead of sticking them in the middle of your container, why not position them around the outer edge of the pot, bring them together at the top, and tie with ribbon?

Pansies are nice so go ahead and plant up a few pots. Then get creative and try some new plants in your containers this spring.

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