

CONTAINER GARDENS

*Putting plants in pots adds options**Text and photos by Dan Johnson*

Gardening in containers can have a big impact and add a sophisticated, artsy feel to an otherwise average landscape. Even simple additions can create complexity and excitement in the garden.

The possibilities are vast. Most containers are portable enough that you can easily change the scene to suit an occasion, or divert the focus when part of the garden is past its prime. Plantings can change each year, creating different moods and combinations without re-landscaping the entire garden.

Container gardens can add height and dimension to any garden, and create an impact where there was only empty space. Consider the view from indoors as well. A lushly planted urn or bowl framed in your favorite window can bring the garden indoors and create a feeling of connection with the garden. If you aren't content with your container garden, changing or relocating is easy.

With that in mind, consider your passions next and look at the style of your garden. In your landscape, are you a collector of many small plants, or do you lean towards simple, big and bold? That may be your preference in your containers as well, but before you



Containers of agaves contrast in color and texture with the tall, yellow "Prairie Sun" Rudbeckia (upper left) and the variegated fuchsia (center) in this garden.

get started, whichever one describes you, consider doing the opposite in your containers. This is an opportunity to try something new.

Nothing will add more energy to your garden than placing an element of contrast among the "sameness" that can exist. Be daring and create a new layer in your garden. This is a chance to branch out and experiment.

RANGE OF CONTAINER PLANTS AVAILABLE

The range of plants has never been easier to explore. Traditional and colorful annuals will blaze in containers all summer, and are standard fare for many gardeners, but there are other options. Fast growing tropicals are often available at quite reasonable prices.

A young Majesty palm (*Ravena rivularis*) may cost no more than a few six-packs of petunias, but it can have several times the impact. Bold, swaying grasses can create motion and energy in a static space. Cannas, Colocasia, Eucomis and other tender summer bulbs grow quickly and their large leaves can be an exotic contrast to the finer textures of many hardy perennials.

Cacti and succulent plants have a sculptural quality that is shown to great advantage when raised above garden level, and they thrive in well-drained containers. In much of the United States, many hardy cacti can remain in their containers in the garden all year as living works of art. This lifts their prickly pads and stems up out of surrounding vegetation and makes caring for them much easier.

Hardy conifers can lend stability and texture to a container grouping. Many dwarf types can remain for several seasons for a more permanent effect on a bal-



Bright blue containers add colorful focal points to the author's garden as a tangle of purple Rocky Mountain penstemon and variegated *Iris pallidaburst* with blooms.

cony or terrace. Larger sorts may be planted directly into the garden when their increasing size no longer suits the container. Either way, colorful and unique cultivars can be absolute treasures and stand apart all year as living sculptures.

There are few limits to your creativity when planting container gardens. Experiment with leaf shape and movement, color and texture, in combinations that you may not have tried before.

Remember that potted gardens can be flexible and colorful additions to a garden that needs that elusive "something extra." 🌱

Dan Johnson has been gardening for as long as he can remember, and has worked in the green industry for more than 25 years. His broad experience and formal training now include eight years with Denver (Colorado) Botanic Gardens Horticulture department, currently as curator of native plant collections where he designs and maintains numerous native and xeric gardens.