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Ideas On How To Use Container Gardening To Decorate Your House And Garden

By Mary Hanna

Nearly every house and garden presents numerous attractive settings for container plants.

Suburban gardens, estates, small city backyards, and summer cottages—all can be enhanced by this type of gardening. A few of the seemingly endless possibilities include entranceways, steps, courtyards, walls, rooftops, balconies, patios, breezeways, lawns, driveways, walks, sundecks, windowsills, porches, summer houses, even tree stumps can be utilized.

Let us start with the entrance, a focal point for every house. A simple arrangement consists of similar container plants at each side of the doorway. If the house is informal, painted tubs will make a cheerful note, while urns or ornamental pots are more appropriate if the architecture is formal. The arrangement, however, need not be symmetrical, since a single container at either side, particularly if the doorway is off-center, is pleasing. A large specimen can be balanced by a grouping of small pots, and various other interesting combinations can be worked out. Sometimes, the front entranceway can qualify as an outdoor place for house plants, but be sure they are not exposed to strong sun and wind.

Unexpected areas like side and rear entrances can also serve as backgrounds for pot plants in casual groupings. For sunny steps, consider tubs of petunias, or dwarf dahlias, or boxes of herbs to be used in cooking. Tuberous begonias, fuchsias, patient Lucy, and fragrant nicotiana solve the problem of what to grow in shade.

Porches or verandas, traditional or contemporary in style, offer numerous settings for pots, window boxes, and hanging baskets. Indeed, the entire container garden can be concentrated there so that plants can be easily cared for. If the porch is open on three sides, it will afford exposures to suit a variety of specimens.

The patio or terrace, beside or beyond the house, where family and friends gather to eat or relax, is an ideal location. If it is formal, select clipped evergreens and arrange pots in symmetrical rows, perhaps lined up against the house or along the edge of the terrace. If the site is informal, make casual groupings of one or two tall plants with smaller ones in front. Either way, allow for a few large plants in tubs or boxes for accent and height.

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Container plants may line walks and paths that lead to the house, garage, or garden. They can rest on paved areas along fences and walls and on driveways where they are not in the way. If the driveway adjoins the foundation of the house, plant containers may be placed there.

Tops of garden or terrace walls are ideal places, too. Put small pots and boxes on tall, narrow walls and large containers on low, broad surfaces. Hanging plants of ivy geraniums in the sun and fuchsias in the shade will cascade from walls, as they do in the patios of Spain, Portugal, and Italy. On Rhodes, I recall a fifteen-foot wall topped with a row of thirty gleaming green tin cans full of roses and other flowers.

Think of what you can do with rooftops and sundecks where considerable space is usually available. Here sun-loving plants, like geraniums, most annuals, cacti, and succulents can be grown, but, again, include large specimens for height to give a garden feeling. A few large boxes and planters for trees and shrubs are sufficient but be sure to include some evergreens for year-round green.

Many gardeners like to insert container plants in flower borders to introduce unusual specimens, such as tropicals in the North. Large tubs can be set at the corners and small pots may be scattered among the permanent flowering plants. One gardener keeps a supply of potted pink Fiat Enchantress geraniums on hand to fill bare spots in her wide borders, moving them about as needed. Most of the geraniums are in four-inch clay pots, but there are larger specimens for the center of each grouping. Make sure their secure, sink pots a few inches into the ground.

You can always dress up the lamp post in your yard with container plants at the base or you can suspend a hanging basket of lantana, perhaps from the top. Ivy geraniums in an old-fashioned black kettle are nice for the base. Bare posts that support sectional roofs over patios or paved surfaces of contemporary houses look more attractive if potted plants are clustered around the bases or permanent boxes for plants are built there. Try planting climbing ivy in a pot and train it to climb the posts.

Novelty containers—donkey carts, wheelbarrows, and spinning wheels—can be fun in some places, but, of course, such planters must not be overdone. Usually they are set on lawns, on a terrace or beside a gate or doorway. (If you live in a neighborhood that has a house owners association check with them first to see if this is allowed). Steps leading to a driveway or street or to different levels in a garden can be emphasized with pot plants. A few can be arranged at the top or at the base of the stairs. And, there are other possibilities. Tree trunks cut to the ground or left a few feet high make good pedestals for large containers. In fact, this can be a solution to the problem of what to do with a trunk too expensive to remove. If you have a tree with heavy shade, why not construct a pretty sitting area around it and decorate the space with containers of coleus, wax and other begonias, caladiums, ferns and other shade-tolerant plants.

These are just a few ideas for using container plants around your house and garden. Use your imagination and have fun. Happy Gardening!

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Winter Gardening

By Candee Stark

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Ok, the title might be a tad bit misleading. I am not suggesting that you actually garden during the winter but you should be using this time to plan your upcoming garden.

As you look out at your yard and garden area during the cold months of winter, let your thoughts run wild and you will be amazed at what images you can conjure up. You might even want to try some of your new found ideas this spring!

- 1.** Pour through garden catalogs, flip the pages and fold down the corner anytime you find something you like. Go back to it often until you decide what new plants and flowers you would like to try this spring.
- 2.** Purchase a gardening book or magazine. Look at what other people are trying in their gardens and see if their ideas inspire you to try something new.
- 3.** Look out your windows and try to visualize how you would like your yard and garden to look like. Study the sun....notice the shady spots.

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4. Make a list of what is important to you, in other words, what do you want from your yard and garden? Do you want to create a patio area for entertaining, a vegetable garden so you grow all of your own vegetables, a quiet area for relaxing, or maybe an area that will attract wildlife. Anything is possible but it is important to recognize what you want before you actually start any gardening project. Ultimately, knowing what you want will save time and money!

5. Take lots of notes and draw any ideas you might come up with.(even those ideas that wake you up in the middle of the night!)

online nurseries

to see what they have to offer. Many sites offer suggestions and

interesting gardening articles as well.

Before you know it spring will be here, you will have a shovel in your hand, and you will have a plan!

Always Happy Gardening!

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