



Brighten Up Tired Summer Containers

It's no surprise that containers planted last spring may be looking haggard now. Despite the careful selection of plants and proper water and fertilizing, some plants are just plain worn out.

The heat has been unforgiving and no amount of water and fertilizer is going to bring them back to peak condition. Now is the time to perk up those containers and keep the color going through the rest of the summer and then through fall.

First, remove any plants that are near death or aren't salvageable. Be gentle. Try not to disturb the roots of neighboring plants as much as possible. This is also a great time to note which plants are looking great – valuable information for next year.

Next, give the remaining plants a good cleaning. A simple pruning or cutting back may be all that is needed to induce fresh blooms. Wayward stems can also be pruned. Deadhead unattractive spent blooms.

Now look at the gaps left by removed plants or those made smaller by pruning. There are two ways to handle the empty spaces. The 'pot within a pot' method can be used by simply placing a potted plant in the space – a 4-inch or 6-inch pot works well. Or plant your new plant directly into the soil. As always, water well after planting.

The best garden centers will still have lots of fresh, beautiful plants available to perk up your container gardens for the rest of summer and then new plants perfect for the cooler temperatures of fall.

Fall mums make their debut at the end of August. The selection of colors is not limited to the autumnal palette of orange, burgundy and yellow. Pastel shades are becoming increasingly popular. If pink, purple and mauve blooms are needed to fit into a container's color scheme, there are mums to fit the bill.

Creamy white mums coordinate with just about any color combination. Bold golds brighten up pots of hot-colored plants like red geraniums or salvias. Subtle bronze shades glimmer next to blue ageratum and gray licorice plant.



Pansies are also among the fall lineup and are a welcome addition to summer-worn containers. Again, the color selection is limitless.

In some cases, a complete overhaul of a container garden is the best solution. Filling it with pansies is not only affordable it's a seasonal punch of color. Decorate your entry with a new look for fall by adding pansies in autumnal shades. Or tuck pansies into existing arrangements – just a few plants can make a big difference.



Other annuals to consider are ornamental cabbage and kale. Their leaves deepen in color with cooler temperatures – real season extenders!

Perennials can breathe new life into container gardens, too. Asters, goldenrod, sedum, and ornamental grasses are just a few of the fall-blooming plants to consider.

Many perennials can be overwintered successfully by either sinking the plant, pot and all, into the ground before the ground freezes or by digging them out of the container and planting them. Add a light layer of mulch for extra winter protection.

Cut branches like curly willow and red or yellow twig dogwood add color to containers. They are perfect for adding height now and later when surrounded by pumpkins, straw or branches of bittersweet.

Give new life to window boxes and container gardens suffering from the dog days of summer. It doesn't take a lot of time or money to decorate your outdoors spaces with the colors of late summer and fall.



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