



## FALL CONTAINER GARDENING

Lisha Utt, Special to the News Post

Fall is not just a great time for planting in the garden, it's also a perfect time to do some container gardening!

If you planted containers filled with beautiful annuals this spring, they may be looking "tired" and you may be tired of them. But with a few simple steps you can spruce up your containers for a beautiful fall display. Plus rejuvenating your pots can get your creative juices flowing again as summer fades into fall and winter approaches.

So first let's talk about caring for your container plants in the fall. The temperatures may be cooler but it is still vital that you continue to water your containers. Remember your plants have been growing all summer and their roots have filled the pot so they can still dry out very quickly.

It's also important to continue to fertilize your containers. The growing season is long for annuals and they will greatly benefit from the nutrients. This is especially true if you are noticing pale leaves and decreased blooms. You can use a water-soluble fertilizer every other watering until the first frost, but even if you just fertilize one more time for the season you'll see the difference in your plants.

Now is also a good time to do some serious tidying in your containers. Continue to deadhead your flowers (i.e. remove all spent blooms) but remove brown leaves and ratty foliage as well. In addition if your plants have grown so large that they are out of proportion to the other plants they are growing with or even the container, go ahead and give them a trim to reign them in and get them back into shape.

After you've cleaned up your containers you may find some plants just cannot be rejuvenated and need to be replaced. Don't be discouraged, this can be the most fun of all. Not just the planting of the new plants, but it will of course require a shopping trip to your favorite nursery and that's always a welcome task. There are many annuals that grow well in the cooler fall conditions. Of course there are the old favorites, *Chrysanthemums*, *Pansies* and *Asters* but also consider *Verbena*, *Nemesia*, *Bidens*, *Million Bells (Calibrachoa)*, *Lantana*, *Zonal Geraniums (Pelargonium x hortum)*, *Red Grass (Pennisetum Rubrum)*, *Diascia* and *Gerbera Daisies*.

Finally if you have a container that you would like to change completely, here's a recipe for creating an October Halloween Surprise. (This collection should fill a 16" container)

Start with a 6" orange/bronze *Chrysanthemum*. Plant it toward the back in the center of the pot. Then surround it with three 4 1/2" *Pansies 'Atlas Black'* and two 4 1/2" *Pansies 'Fama Orange'*, alternating black, orange, black, etc. Finish with 3 4 1/2" *Ajuga 'Black Scallop'* in front of the pansies to soften the edge. Add a Jack O' Lantern or two around the base of your pot and you're ready to go!

If

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cannot find these plants or want other ideas, consider *Osteospermum* ‘Symphony Orange’, *Ophiopogon* ‘Black Dragon’ (also known as black mondo grass) or *Heuchera* ‘Dolce Licorice’. Or you may already have black or orange plants in your containers to work with. Do you have *Sweet Potato Vine* ‘Blackie’, *Superbells* ‘Tequila Sunrise’ or even orange *Marigolds*?

Fall container gardening can be great fun. And if you’re like me and are sorry to see the warm weather go, it’s a wonderful way to extend the growing season just a little longer.

Happy Gardening!

Lisha Utt  
Frederick County Master Gardener

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