



Fall Container Gardening

Lisha Utt,
Frederick County Master Gardener

UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND
EXTENSION
Solutions in your community

I adore container gardening! Throughout the summer, my patio and deck are filled with pots of all different shapes and sizes, overflowing with a riot of colorful flowers and foliage. I water with love every day, enjoying the plants and flowers as they grow and weave together. But now it's fall. I can feel my focus turning indoors. I'm still watering with 'love', though only every other day, and I'm starting to consider which plants I might bring in for the winter and which will have to go. And while I'm not ready to empty all my containers, not just yet, I would like to rein it in a bit, to have to care for only a few. So here is my fall container gardening plan.....maybe it (or a portion of it) will work for you too.

First I will decide how many containers I really want to maintain through the fall, i.e. in my mind Thanksgiving. I usually keep my pots on the front porch, then two or three containers on the patio and deck in highly visible locations. I like to be able to see a container from wherever I sit on my deck plus have a least one in view from my kitchen.

Next with a critical eye, I will assess my current pots and let the downsizing begin. I'll do a vigorous clean up of each container, trimming with gusto all the dead leaves, stems and spent blooms. I'll even pull out plants that are just too far gone. Then I'll divide the pots into three groups. The first group will include those pots where the majority of the plants just don't look nice anymore. I will clean out the plants and put those pots away. The plants in the second group will include those containers that still look pretty good, too nice to remove right now, so I'll keep them as is for another couple of weeks. And finally the third group will be my 'star' pots, the ones I will focus on for this fall.

It is this third group of containers that will get all my attention. After their vigorous clean up I will fill in bare spots with chrysanthemums, pansies or other annuals. Many annuals you plant in the spring can survive temperatures down to 30 degrees or below including ----- *Diascia* (0F), *Verbena* (15F), *Nemesia* (10F), *Muehlenbeckia*, 'Creeping Wire Vine' (-35F), *Bidens ferulifolia* (30F), *Calibrachoa*, 'Million Bells' (30F), *Lantana* (28F) and *Osteospermum* (25F). The low temperature the plant can tolerate is listed in parenthesis. (See pictures on next page.)

Lots of garden centers will have an excellent selection of these cool tolerant annuals. And I won't forget about herbs—many perennial herbs such as chives, oregano and thyme make a welcome and delicious addition to fall containers. I may also use pumpkins or interesting gourds as a simple way to bring fall color to my pots. Or if I am feeling frugal, I will fill in with annuals from my other 'non-star' pots. If I do purchase new plants I will be sure to buy full, healthy ones. The days are shorter now and the temperatures cooler, so plants will not fill in as quickly as they do in the summer.

EQUAL ACCESS PROGRAMS
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Finally I will care for these fall containers like I did the summer ones, with regular watering (though probably daily won't be required), deadheading (removing spent blooms) and even fertilizing, if I'm feeling ambitious. I can use a water-soluble fertilizer every other watering until the first frost, but even if I just fertilize one more time for the season, the plants will show a definite improvement. Then I'll sit back and enjoy, and hope the really cold days stay away for a long while.

For more information about horticulture or the Master Gardener Program in Frederick County, call the Frederick County Office of the University of Maryland Extension, (301) 600-1596, or visit <http://www.frederick.umd.edu/>. Our mission is to educate Maryland residents about safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes and communities.



Verbena Light Blue



S Bells Red



Lantana Yellow



Diascia Coral



Nemesis Blue