



Fall Container Gardening

Lisha Utt, Frederick County Master Gardener

I love container gardening. It is by far the most creative and satisfying aspect of gardening that I do. But now fall weather is here with its' cooler temperatures, a supposed welcome respite from the summer heat and humidity. I should be happy but confess I am not. My mind is already skipping ahead to winter when my pots are empty and stacked forlornly in the garage.

So in an effort not to succumb to these "pre-winter blues", I've decided to spend as much time as possible outdoors this fall and try to keep my containers looking good until the first frost, even beyond. Here is my plan:

#1. Continue to water the containers regularly. The temperatures may be cooler but the plants have been growing all summer and their roots have filled the pot so they can still dry out very quickly. Daily watering may even be required.

#2. Continue to fertilize the containers. The growing season is long for annuals and they will greatly benefit from the nutrients. This is especially true if the plants have pale leaves and decreased blooms. A water-soluble fertilizer can be used every other watering until the first frost, but even if just fertilized one more time for the season, the plants will show a definite improvement.

#3. Do some serious tidying of the containers. It's important not only to continue to deadhead the plants (i.e. remove all spent blooms) but brown leaves and ratty foliage should also be removed. In addition if the plants have grown so large that they are out of proportion to the others they are growing with, or even the container, give them a trim to get them back into shape.

#4. Pick one container for a complete makeover, preferably one that is close to the house so it can be enjoyed both inside and out. By replacing your tender or tropical plants with those that can take temperatures past freezing, you'll ensure that at least one container will look good deep into fall, maybe even until Christmas?! Plus buying a few new plants is always good therapy.

The selection of fall flowers seems to improve every year. There are of course, the old favorites, chrysanthemums, asters and pansies. However try some of these other frost tolerant annuals (The low temperature they can tolerate is listed in parenthesis.) ----- *Diascia* (0F), *Verbena* (15F), *Nemesia* (10F), *Muehlenbeckia*, 'Creeping Wire Vine' (-35F), *Bidens ferulifolia* (30F), *Calibrachoa*, 'Million Bells' (30F), *Lantana* (28F) and *Osteospermum* (25F). Ornamental grasses such as *Imperata*, 'Red Baron' (Zone 7-11) or *Juncus effuses*, 'Quartz Creek' (Zone 4-11), as well as perennials with colorful foliage like *Heuchera* (Zone 4-8) can make a stunning addition to any fall container. And you can even use perennial herbs such as *Sage* or *Thyme* with the added bonus of having them close by for cooking. Most of these plants can be found at your local garden centers. Plus keep them in mind for next spring so you can include them in your containers from the beginning.

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The container I selected for a makeover included *Alteranthera*, 'Partytime', *Exotic Impatiens*, 'Fusion Heat', Tassel Fern (*Polystichum, polyblepharum*) and variegated *Hedera*. In an effort to keep the pink/rose summer theme, I decided to replace the tropical *Exotic Impatiens* and *Alteranthera* with *Diascia*, 'Flying Red', *Pansies*, 'Delta Rose Blotch', golden *Sage* and *Heuchera* 'Marmalade'. Now my container is ready for cooler temperatures.

So if you find yourself coming down with the "pre-winter blues", do some fall container gardening. It's the perfect prescription. I feel better already!

For more information about horticulture or the Master Gardener Program in Frederick County, call the Frederick County Office of the Maryland Cooperative 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.

BEFORE:



AFTER:

