THREE EASY STEPS TO FABULOUS FALL AND WINTER CONTAINERS
Lisha Utt, Frederick County Master Gardener

Cooler temperatures may be here but it doesn’t mean you can’t still have beautiful containers. Fall, much to my surprise, has become one of my most favorite times to garden. With so many wonderful fall blooming perennials, seed heads and changing leaves, it is a very colorful time in the backyard. It’s a pleasure to tidy up the flower beds, hopefully weed for the ‘last time’ and add fall annuals without the sweltering heat of summer.

My flower containers get a makeover at this time of year too. While I’m sad to see the summer annuals fade away, I’ve found there are lots of interesting plants available now to make beautiful combinations that can take your containers through the fall and into winter.

Step 1 – Choosing the Containers In the summer my containers are everywhere, the front porch, the patio, the deck, the garden border, everywhere, but in the fall I just pick a few to keep. There are two things to consider when deciding which containers to transition, location and the material of the container itself. Consider choosing containers that you will see the most, for example your front porch, by a garage or side entrance or maybe on your deck or patio in a spot visible from inside your home. Next make sure the containers are made of materials that can take the cold temperatures such as iron, fiberglass or plastic.

Step 2 – Evaluate the Current Plants Once you’ve selected your containers evaluate the plants that are still in them. There are several summer plants that look good well into fall including Grasses, Zonal Geraniums, Lantana, Verbena and Diascia. If some of your current plants still look good, keep them, otherwise remove them all.

Step 3 – Decide What to Plant Let’s start with something for height. Good choices would include Chrysanthemums, there are late blooming varieties still available, perennial Grasses, or even a pumpkin that you could set in your container and plant around. Next add two to three mid-level plants. My favorite perennial for fall containers is Heuchera, commonly called Coral Bells. It has beautiful foliage that comes in a variety of colors including amber-gold, crimson red, variegated green and cream, and plum purple. Ornamental Cabbages and Kale and of course, Pansies make the perfect additions for color and interest. Finally add something to soften the edges and trail over the side. In the perennial category try Ajuga reptans sometimes referred to as Bugleweed. A ground cover in the garden, its foliage comes in an array of colors from deep green to burgundy red to black. Lysimachia nummularia ‘Creeping Jenny’ or Hedera helix also perennials, make excellent trailers.

And lastly when the Chrysanthemum has finished blooming or the pumpkin is ready for the compost pile, replace it with Liriope or a small evergreen such as a Dwarf Alberta Spruce, Boxwood or Holly. Many garden centers feature small evergreens for the holidays.
As a final note, fall containers do not require the dedicated watering care of summer pots but if we have a long dry spell they will appreciate a drink.

Enjoy this fall gardening season!

List of plants for photo#1

List of plants for photo #2
Liriope muscari ‘Big Blue’, Kale ‘Emperor Red’ and Pansies ‘Matrix Clear Mix’

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