

This is the perfect time to plant up a few containers of fun things. My gardening buddy Fay Linger and I go to the same hairdresser in downtown Poulsbo and the window boxes on the building were designed and planted by Sylvia Smith from the Garden Shop at Poulsbo Market Thriftway. Sylvia used Gartenmeister Fuchsias with bronzy-burgundy foliage and tangerine colored blossoms as the tall anchor plants. Next come perpendicular Helichrysum Limelight (Licorice Vine) with chartreuse velvety leaves. White Begonia Whiskey with bronze foliage is nestled near the front. Black mondo grass (*Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens') is at the very edge of the window boxes and a lovely plant looking like a combination of fuchsia and impatiens called *Centradenia wends* and twines it's way throughout the planting. *Centradenia* is a pale magenta. The color combination and foliage texture mixes of this planting is exquisite. One of the more striking I've seen.

When choosing your containers and selecting plants let your imagination carry you away. Probably the only rule you'll need to remember is make sure the container has drainage holes. If you want a water or bog garden, you won't even need drainage. Remember too that hardware stores have plumbing supplies to plug drainage holes for a water-garden friendly container.

Haunt the hardware or feed stores and look for aluminum or tin buckets and watering troughs. These are perfect for water gardens. I've even seen an aluminum boat planted as a water garden. (Do you think some of our husbands would let us use their fishing boat for a water garden? Perhaps not.) Hey, now maybe you'll have a whole new reason to check out those garage sales. Who knows what you'll discover as a container for plants.

Remember too that container plants need regular and sometimes frequent watering and also require frequent fertilizing (especially annual plants). Master Gardener Patti Gilbert mixed alfalfa pellets into her potting mix this year before planting up her containers. This was a ready source of nitrogen for her plants this year. Other gardeners use fish fertilizer, compost tea and kelp fertilizer. Liquid mixtures will be quickly absorbed and powders and pellets will dissolve more slowly. Container plants will thank you for giving them a bit of extra nourishment.

You can move containers around to take advantage of sun or shade. Put shade-loving plants on covered porches for some pizzazz. Favorites for shady spaces are ferns and hostas and *Lamium* (Dead Nettle). *Lamium* also looks great in hanging baskets. Many vegetables will grow happily in containers. It's the perfect time to plant up some Swiss chard and lettuces for winter salads. Try Brite Lights Swiss Chard. Grasses and sedges suit sunny places. Many gardeners love New Zealand flax. I've resisted the temptation of these plants for way too long. They'll be in pots on my deck soon. Try some yourself.

Bulbs are especially great. You'll find a bulb for every season. I plant up bulbs and place the pots in various garden locations to see if I'll like their color and foliage there. Sometimes I move the pots around a few times. Finally, after the bulbs finish blooming, I then place them in the ground in the location I like the best. Other bulbs live happily in their pots for several years.

Herbs are especially satisfactory for a year or two before outgrowing their container and needing permanent homes. Try lavender, rosemary, thyme, sage, fennel and mint. Any plants in the mint family or square-stemmed plants are suited to containers. It's a perfect way to control their rampant/rapid spread. I highly recommend growing the yellow-gold *Alstroemeria* in pots. It tends to reseed and sprawl itself all over a garden. The flowers are wonderful in cut bouquets. It's worth growing them in pots. Another favorite container plant is *crocsmia* found in shades of yellow, orange and red. *Acers* (Japanese maples) and several birch and willows work well in containers for one to three years before needing permanent homes in the landscape. Growing a tree in a pot might entice an interest in bonsai.

Growing plants in containers will provide years and years of gardening adventure. It's a great excuse to experiment and gives you a reason to visit that nursery or garden center yet one more time.