10 Best Container Gardens
OUR 10 BEST
CONTAINER GARDENS

1. START WITH THE CONTAINERS
Make eye-catching pots the foundation for your display.

Georgia floral designer Carmen Johnston selected these glazed blue pots because “they intensify just about any color of flower or foliage you pair with them.” To get the proportions right, choose three of varying sizes—small, medium, and large. Place a lightweight filler, such as an upside-down plastic nursery pot, in the bottom half of the largest pot to take up space and reduce weight. Fill all three pots with a good-quality potting mix.

2. TAKE SPRING INDOORS
Brighten any day with a container of colorful flowering bulbs.

The TV weather guy will tell you spring starts on March 20, but gardeners know better. If you buy pots of bulbs forced for early blooms, spring begins whenever you want. Here, we’ve paired an assortment of popular bulbs with an industrial-style galvanized-metal container that you might find at a flea market, antiques store, or online.

If the combo sounds a bit jarring, just imagine pearls worn with jeans or barbecue served on fine china. Search local garden centers for inexpensive forced bulbs. Select small pots of individually forced bulbs, or look for large pots with multiple blooms for dividing. Make sure to buy healthy, firm bulbs with tightly closed buds. Pack bulbs closely to intensify their fragrance and beauty. Top off your living arrangement with lush, green moss. Rustic meets refined never looked so good.

CREATE A FOCAL POINT
In the largest pot, working from back to front and tallest to shortest, densely plant ‘Liberty Classic Yellow’ snapdragon [1], ‘Bouquet Rose Magic’ dianthus [2], and ‘Tickled Pink’ veronica [3]. Place ‘New Look’ dusty miller [4] and ‘Lemon Ball’ sedum [5] in the front to trail over the edge.

ADD POPS OF COLOR
Pack a powerful, single-note punch in the two smaller pots by planting ‘Supertunia Vista Bubblegum’ petunia [6] in the midsize container and more sedum in the smallest pot.

KEEP IT LOOKING GREAT
Place in full sun, and water till moist to the touch. Feed with a blossom-booster fertilizer according to label directions. Deadhead spent flowers, and pinch as needed to keep plants bushy and blooming. If desired, you can move the perennials (veronica and sedum) to a bed or border in your garden at season’s end.

HOW TO ASSEMBLE
Line container with plastic to prevent rust.
Fill container halfway with soil, and then add a layer of gravel, which improves drainage and keeps bulbs upright.
Nestle bulbs closely into gravel, planting from left to right and tallest to shortest. Add a top layer of soil to cover bulbs.
Mulch with sheet moss.

CONTAINER RECIPE
1. Dutch hyacinths
2. Trumpet daffodils
3. Pink tulips
4. Grape hyacinths
5. Miniature daffodils
6. Green sheet moss

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3. BEAT THE HEAT

These striking plants offer nonstop color until fall’s first frost.

Pick summer-proof plants. High temps and stifling humidity are no sweat for the flowers and foliage shown here. ‘Design A Line’ cordyline [1] (southernlivingplants.com) boasts spiky leaves and creates a dark foil to the chartreuse foliage in front. ‘Wasabi’ coleus [2] has serrated leaves and a distinctive zesty lime color. A ‘Calliope Dark Red’ geranium [3] offers stunning semidouble flowers and can grow up to 18 inches tall. ‘Sweet Caroline Light Green’ sweet potato vine [4] ensures you’ll always have lush leaves trailing down the side of the pot. You can keep this vine under control by clipping it every few weeks.

HOW TO ASSEMBLE

To fill a 21-inch-diameter planter, let two 6-inch pots of cordyline stand tall at the back, forming a fan of deep purple foliage. Then mingle a pair of 4-inch coleus plants and a single 1-gallon geranium in the middle of the container. For the finishing touch, allow one 4-inch sweet potato vine to spill over the edge, creating a soft, romantic effect.

KEEP IT THRIVING

These plants are all delightfully low maintenance. Just give them full to partial sun, pinch off spent geranium blooms as needed, and water when the coleus begin to wilt.

To give the flowers an extra boost, apply a fertilizer such as Dynamite All-Purpose Indoor & Outdoor (18-6-8) according to label directions.

4. BRING ON THE SUN

This high-aroma, low-maintenance container spotlights SunPatiens—and butterflies are their biggest fans.

For all its razzle-dazzle, this summer-loving arrangement requires just three plants.

SET THE STAGE WITH FOLIAGE

The 1-gallon foxtail asparagus fern [1] may seem like a background character, but it plays much more than just a bit part. Its tall, handsome plumes in various shades of green offer stature to the glazed container, highlighting the eye-catching pink blooms of ‘Variegated Spreading Salmon’ SunPatiens [2].

LET THE STAR SHINE

Though it gets top billing with its pretty blooms and dramatic two-toned foliage, SunPatiens is no prima donna. It stands up to heat and humidity like a trouper. Unlike traditional New Guinea impatiens, the SunPatiens was bred to take full sun. This seasoned performer offers abundant 2- to 3-inch flowers from now until frost. A single 4-inch pot will put on a big show and fill out your container, growing up to 18 inches high and 20 inches wide.

INCLUDE A SIDECICK

Despite playing just a supporting role, a 6-inch pot of ‘Neon’ pothos [3] actually steals some of the limelight with its glossy chartreuse foliage tumbling over the pot.

KEEP IT PERFORMING

Place your container in any light from partial shade to full sun, and water whenever the soil feels dry. To ensure a lush look until fall, fertilize with a slow-release product, such as Osmocote Outdoor & Indoor (19-6-12), following label directions.
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PICK YOUR TEAM
Garden centers abound with flowers and foliage in a rainbow of options—from Tar Heel blue to Tennessee orange to Sooner red and every shade in between. Express your spirit in a beautiful way. If your family boasts fans of different stripes, make multiple containers to give everyone something to cheer about.

RECRUIT A CONTAINER
Select a pot inspired by your team’s colors.

Red: Nantucket Square Planter in Scarlet Red, $105; grandinroad.com
Blue: Garden Treasures Indoor/Outdoor Planter, $24.98; lowes.com
Black: Rodin Round Planter in Zinc, $89; Ballard Designs.com
Orange: 23.5” Marchioro Terra Cotta Plastic Planter, $83.91; homedepot.com
White: Tuscan Planter, from $199; potterybarn.com

6. SHOW YOUR TRUE COLORS
Pledge allegiance to your school with a winning container.

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Let’s hear it for elephant’s ear! Its oversize leaves—the secret to this stately combination—create drama through scale. Fill in the blanks with coreopsis, Douglas iris, ‘Archangel Raspberry’ and ‘Archangel Pink’ angelonia, blue daze, fanflower, creeping Jenny, and English ivy. Place it in full to part sun, give it moist, well-drained soil, and enjoy it for months!

5. SUMMERTIME FLAIR
Combine these heat-loving plants for an amazing display from now through fall.

Score Big With These Plants
to fill your pots, look for plants that require similar sun and soil conditions. And don’t be surprised if you see pots inspired by rival teams popping up all over the neighborhood. Just whistle your fight song and know deep down that your container’s really the best.
7. SWEEPING VINES

Let it all spill out.

Jen Stringer Obi designed this amazing stop-and-stare sight. A trio of boxes filled with white caladiums, red ti plants, and dramatic swags of creeping Jenny and ivy enlivens the facade of this historic home.

8. TROPICAL DRAMA

Punch up the color.

This window box by Kelli Shaw illustrates her characteristically bold and unexpected design approach. A red-centered, starlike bromeliad seems to burst from the box, and red-stemmed caladiums echo that color. Then, spiky maroon cordyline, deep purple heuchera, pink begonias, and trailing 'Outback Sunset' golden globes fill out this arresting showpiece.
9. SHADY LADY

A simple-to-follow formula is all you need to create drama.

Here, four plants convey the illusion of a sweeping floor-length gown. The key to pulling this off is starting with an elevated planter so the vibrant ‘Celebration’ and ‘Florida Sweetheart’ caladiums pop at eye level. Clusters of white wishbone flower fill empty spaces between the caladium stems and also conceal the actual container, which means you can use just about any freestanding vessel. The final attention-getter is the graceful creeping Jenny spilling over the sides. Keep this planter in the shade and water regularly for a gorgeous, easy-to-maintain display.

10. ELEVATE YOUR BLOOMS

Take a hanging basket to new heights with breezy color and a clever twist.

This pretty and practical combo, created by garden designer James Farmer, is suspended from a vintage well pulley. “To ensure success, choose plants as laid-back as summer itself,” says Farmer. First, line a large wire-frame basket with water-soaked sheet moss, and then layer with plastic that has holes punched in it. Fill with premoistened potting mix, and work in a handful of composted manure or mushroom compost. Porch hanging baskets can get sun on one side and shade on the other, so Farmer chose plants that thrive in both situations, placing asparagus ferns on either side of the basket and staggering ‘Dragon Wing’ pink begonias, ‘Sinbad’ angel-wing begonias, and pink tuberous begonias in the middle. Add ‘Diamond Frost’ euphorbia on the sunny side and ‘Key Lime Pie’ heuchera in shade. Baskets dry out quickly, so check them daily and water as needed. Feed monthly with a water-soluble liquid fertilizer and your basket will look great till frost.