How would YOU do this: Tables or CSS? [closed]

Asked 15 years, 9 months ago   Modified 2 years, 2 months ago

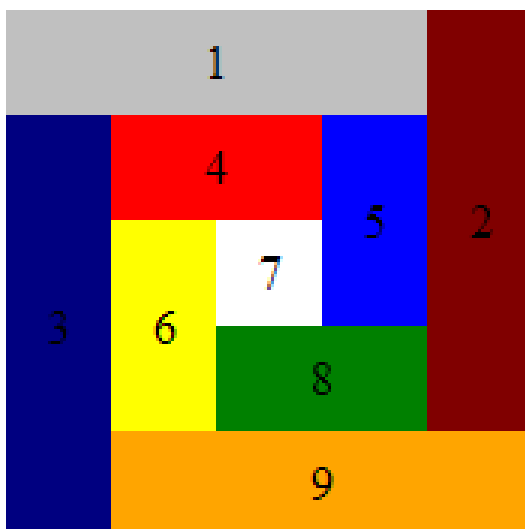Viewed 5k times

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> As it currently stands, this question is not a good fit for our Q&A format. We expect answers to be supported by facts, references, or expertise, but this question will likely solicit debate, arguments, polling, or extended discussion. If you feel that this question can be improved and possibly reopened, visit the help center for guidance.
>
> Closed 12 years ago.

(source: sontag.ca)

Part I

This layout can be done quite simply with 2 HTML tables, one nested inside the other, or even with a single table.

It can also be done with CSS, though it might involve *a little more thinking*.

This may not be a real world layout, but I have seen pages that are similar. Consider this a riddle; an exercise to buff up your CSS skills.

To make things a little more interesting, I have framed the question in a little 2 part web page called [The Challenge](#). We will examine the code and the question: **Layout with tables or CSS?**, side-by-side, blow-by-blow, as our two opponents battle it out for code supremacy.

Part I lays out how **[The Challenge](#)** came to be. I hope you enjoy.

Part II is [The Decision](#). *You might be surprised*.

Part II

I was amazed at how quickly really good answers appeared mere *minutes* after I posted. It was a humbling experience. I have no desire to compete in time trials with you.
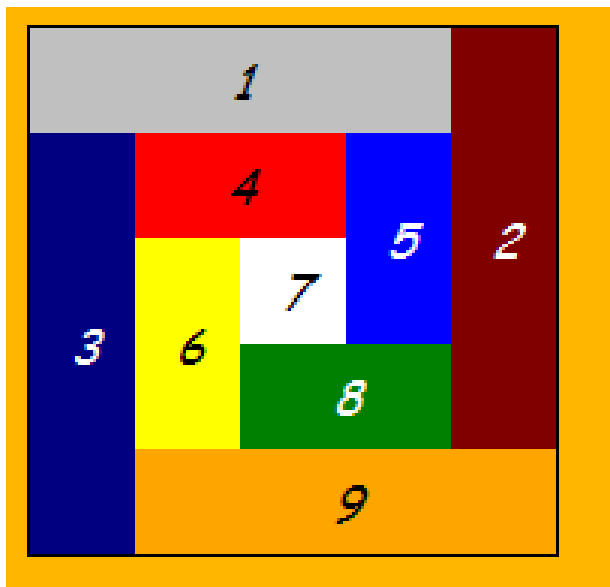
BUT, all that being said, upon close examination of the solutions offered, I came to realize that none of the CSS solutions (including my own at the time) worked as well as either of the table solutions offered. The Challenge

was all about CSS being better than tables for **any** layout solution.

So I added 3 new rules (remember, one of the rules is that the rules can be changed). This annoyed some people. So then I added some colorful explanations about why the rules were changed. I think this annoyed them even more.

1. Our garden is to have a fence around it; something to set it apart from whatever dreary surroundings it may find itself in; and not too expensive, but easy to keep clean. So I want a 1 pixel black border around the garden

2. Inhabitants of each garden plot (the characters) must be either black or white, depending on which shows them the best in their garden. Also they are all of cursive descent. There are no italics amoung them. ;-)

3. The garden is relocatable, that is, I can have this garden, anywhere on the page (no absolute positioning).

This is what the final output is to look like (background color optional):

(source:)

My apologies for the capricious and last minute rule changes. I had it wrong. The inhabitants of each garden plot are artisans, hand crafted specialists. They are descendants of the *cursive family*, and owe their sense of style to the *italics*.

The garden has to be relocatable because both kinds of gardens (table and CSS) need to **coexist** on the same page. I may be wrong to say that `position:absolute` rules are not allowed. If you can get them to work in this context, then more power to you. They will certainly be accepted.

I asked for a fence around the plot because each garden type is going to be planted in a countryside with an orange background very similar to the color of the some of the flowers we grow.
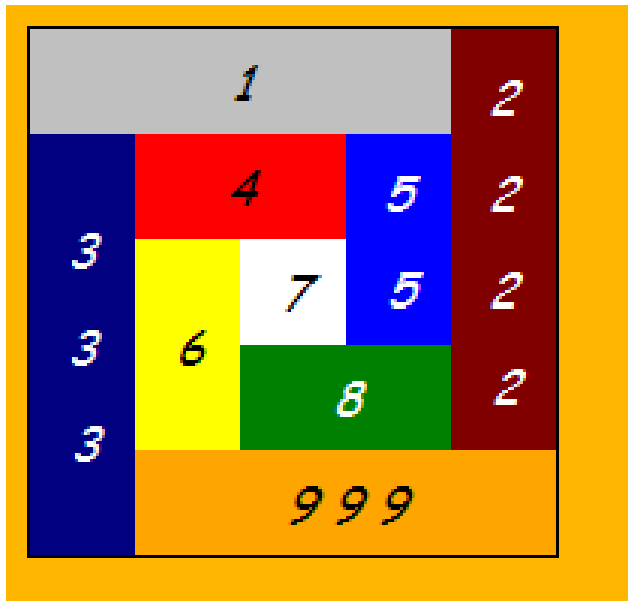
I live in Holland now, and the Tulip season is fast approaching. If you fly over Holland in the next few weeks, and it's a clear day (kind of rare here) the

landscape below you will look rather similar to this silly exercise.

I'm not crazy about orange but I do like and admire the Dutch, so that is why we have an orange background, a tribute to my host country. :-)

Part III

I have posted Ted's [table answer](#) from The Challenge below along with this image

(source: [sontag.ca](#))

because the occupants can be easily added to the garden plots without touching the CSS rules - everything is automatically centered.

Can you do this with **CSS?** *Can you chop down the mightiest tree in the forest with... a herring?*

Update: Charlie's answer is here.

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I don't see why you would want to nest 2 tables for this, it can be done in one. – Jacco Mar 11, 2009 at 23:07

Are the heights and widths all fixed? – alex Mar 11, 2009 at 23:09

Am I right in thinking the aim is to create the most concise markup possible? – Sam Hasler Mar 12, 2009 at 0:49

4   Do we have to include the Dr Suess character? – Andrew Shepherd Mar 12, 2009 at 1:47

15   Wow... Post a question, get several great solutions, modify the question, get more feedback, modify it again, get more input, then post your own solution and accept that. Are you just trying to drum up traffic for your site? – Prestaul Mar 15, 2009 at 1:26

12 Answers

Sorted by: Highest score (default) ⇕

Update: *Final edit.* Switched to STRICT DTD, removed italic to match the image in the question, and reverted

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back to full colour names for ids to show intent as per OPs comment on question, and sorted the main column of id names in the css into the order they appear in the html.

I also opted not to reused the outer div as the white 7 square (it didn't have it's own div in [previous edits](#)), as it wouldn't have been practical if you wanted to use the layout, and felt a little like cheating (although from a brevity/pixel perfect standpoint I liked the cheekiness of it).

View here: http://jsbin.com/efidi
Edit here: http://jsbin.com/efidi/edit
Validates as XHTML strict

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//E
   "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xml:lang="e
<head><title>The Challenge</title>
<style type="text/css">
div      { text-align: center; width:175px; height:175p
div div {         float:left; width: 35px; height: 35p
#orange, #maroon,
#blue   , #green  {float:right;}

#orange, #silver {background-color:silver;  width:140p
#navy   , #maroon {background-color:maroon; height:140p
         #navy   {background-color:navy  ;}
#green , #red     {background-color:red    ;  width: 70p
#yellow, #blue    {background-color:blue   ; height: 70p
         #yellow {background-color:yellow;}
         #white  {background-color:white ;}
         #green  {background-color:green ;}
         #orange {background-color:orange;}
</style>
</head>
<body>
```

```
<div>
  <div id="silver">1</div>
  <div id="maroon">2</div>
  <div id="navy"  >3</div>
  <div id="red"   >4</div>
  <div id="blue"  >5</div>
  <div id="yellow">6</div>
  <div id="white" >7</div>
  <div id="green" >8</div>
  <div id="orange">9</div>
</div>
</body></html>
```

Aside: I would perhaps put a little more whitespace in if I could, but this is at the limit before the code blocks here on SO starts getting scrollbars and I opted to have it all appear on screen.

Note: I borrowed the `line-height` fix from Tyson (who was first to get a correctly rendering answer).
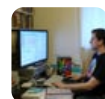
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answered Mar 11, 2009 at 23:36

Sam Hasler

12.6k ● 10 ● 73 ● 106

This solution works in IE 5.5, IE7, and Firefox 3. It just needs the numbers and it's perfect. – attack Mar 11, 2009 at 23:41

Minified my answer and by my count it's 180 characters less than the table solution: 1042 (table) to 858 (mine) characters not counting body/head/style tags. – Sam Hasler Mar 12, 2009 at 4:07

You forgot the right font "Comic Sans MS" and blue text color if you really want a pixel perfect solution. ;) – Gumbo Mar 12, 2009 at 9:57

It does NOT render correctly in IE6.SP1 on Win2k. (but what does?) – Jacco Mar 12, 2009 at 10:47

In the image above the text is black and non-italic, so I've decided to ignore the font now. – Sam Hasler Mar 12, 2009 at 11:38

Here are three solutions.

The markup:

```
<div id="outer">
    <div id="a1">1</div>
    <div id="a2">2</div>
    <div id="a3">3</div>
    <div id="a4">4</div>
    <div id="a5">5</div>
    <div id="a6">6</div>
    <div id="a7">7</div>
    <div id="a8">8</div>
    <div id="a9">9</div>
</div>
```

The basic stylesheet (dimensions and color):

```
#outer {
    width: 20em;
    height: 20em;
}
#a1 {
    background-color: #C0C0C0;
    width: 80%;
    height: 20%;
```

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```css
}
#a2 {
    background-color: #800000;
    width: 20%;
    height: 80%;
}
#a3 {
    background-color: #000080;
    width: 20%;
    height: 80%;
}
#a4 {
    background-color: #FF0000;
    width: 40%;
    height: 20%;
}
#a5 {
    background-color: #0000FF;
    width: 20%;
    height: 40%;
}
#a6 {
    background-color: #FFFF00;
    width: 20%;
    height: 40%;
}
#a7 {
    background-color: #FFFFFF;
    width: 20%;
    height: 20%;
}
#a8 {
    background-color: #008000;
    width: 40%;
    height: 20%;
}
#a9 {
    background-color: #FFA500;
    height: 20%;
    width: 80%;
}
```

And now the positioning:

- Using `float`:

```css
#a1 {
    float: left;
}
#a2 {
    float: right;
}
#a3 {
    float: left;
}
#a4 {
    float: left;
}
#a5 {
    float: right;
}
#a6 {
    float: left;
}
#a7 {
    float: left;
}
#a8 {
    float: right;
}
#a9 {
    float: right;
}
```

- Using `position`:

```css
#outer {
    position: relative;
}
#outer div {
    position: absolute;
}
#a1 {
    top: 0;
    left: 0;
}
```

```
#a2 {
    top: 0;
    right: 0;
}
#a3 {
    top: 20%;
    left: 0;
}
#a4 {
    top: 20%;
    left: 20%;
}
#a5 {
    top: 20%;
    right: 20%;
}
#a6 {
    top: 40%;
    left: 20%;
}
#a7 {
    top: 40%;
    left: 40%;
}
#a8 {
    bottom: 20%;
    right: 20%;
}
#a9 {
    bottom: 0;
    right: 0;
}
```

- Using `margin`:

```
#a1 {
}
#a2 {
    margin: -20% -80% 0 80%;
}
#a3 {
    margin: -60% 0 0 0;
}
```

```
#a4 {
    margin: -80% -20% 0 20%;
}
#a5 {
    margin: -20% -60% 0 60%;
}
#a6 {
    margin: -20% -20% 0 20%;
}
#a7 {
    margin: -40% -40% 0 40%;
}
#a8 {
    margin: 0 -40% 0 40%;
}
#a9 {
    margin: 0 -20% 0 20%;
}
```

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edited Mar 12, 2009 at 0:02

answered Mar 11, 2009 at 23:28

Gumbo
655k ● 112 ● 790 ● 851

text isn't vertically and horizontally centered. (nor is it italic, although that's a minor quibble.) – Sam Hasler Mar 12, 2009 at 0:47

Technically it's also not to the correct size (the challenge page linked to in the question states that there is a 35px square in the center.) – Sam Hasler Mar 12, 2009 at 0:54

6   Well I though it's a layout question and not a pixel-by-pixel question. – Gumbo Mar 12, 2009 at 9:16

1   It's both layout an pixel. I want it ALL. – Diogenes Mar 12, 2009 at 20:04

2   Well then just replace 20em by 175px. The rest stays the same. – Gumbo Mar 12, 2009 at 20:41

Here you go - less lines than any misuse of table tags can provide:

```
<img
    src="http://sontag.ca/TheChallenge/tiles.gif"
    alt="nine assorted coloured rectangles"
/>
```

:P

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answered Mar 12, 2009 at 0:46

Peter Boughton
112k ● 32 ● 123 ● 177

You can even fit it in just one line! – Gumbo Mar 12, 2009 at 9:50

If necessary, yes, but this is more readable. :)
– Peter Boughton Mar 12, 2009 at 10:04

No, I specifically avoided it, to make a point.
– Peter Boughton Mar 13, 2009 at 10:23

8   that's *the* correct solution from a developer!:) – boj Apr 28, 2009 at 19:22

@PeterBoughton: He said to use CSS. You forgot the encode the image in a `background: ...` data-uri, then

This matches your table example exactly, including the vertically and horizontally centered text (which no one else has done so far).

```html
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//E
    "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xml:lang="e
<head>
    <meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html

    <title>Boxy Boxes in a Box</title>

    <style type="text/css" media="screen">
        #container {position: relative; margin: 100px
width: 175px; font-style: italic; }

        .box {width: 35px; height: 35px; position: abs
center; line-height: 35px;}

        #box_1 {top: 0; left: 0; width: 140px; backgro
        #box_2 {top: 0; right: 0; height: 140px; backg
line-height: 140px;}
        #box_3 {top: 35px; left: 0; height: 140px; bac
line-height: 140px;}
        #box_4 {top: 35px; left: 35px; width: 70px; ba
        #box_5 {top: 35px; right: 35px; height: 70px;
line-height: 70px;}
        #box_6 {top: 70px; left: 35px; height: 70px; b
line-height: 70px;}
        #box_7 {top: 70px; left: 70px; background-colo
        #box_8 {bottom: 35px; right: 35px; width: 70px
green;}
        #box_9 {bottom: 0; right: 0; width: 140px; bac
    </style>
</head>
```

```
<body>
    <div id="container">
        <div id="box_1" class="box">1</div>
        <div id="box_2" class="box">2</div>
        <div id="box_3" class="box">3</div>
        <div id="box_4" class="box">4</div>
        <div id="box_5" class="box">5</div>
        <div id="box_6" class="box">6</div>
        <div id="box_7" class="box">7</div>
        <div id="box_8" class="box">8</div>
        <div id="box_9" class="box">9</div>
    </div>
</body>
</html>
```

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answered Mar 11, 2009 at 23:35

Tyson

6,244 ● 3 ● 34 ● 37

Well done, you got there first. I've borrowed some ideas for my own answer. I've tried to make mine as concise as I can. – Sam Hasler Mar 12, 2009 at 0:58

(In case you've moved on and haven't noticed the updates to the question) are you going to update to follow the new rules? – Sam Hasler Mar 13, 2009 at 14:34

Eh, not really. I solved it as originally stated. I'm not going to blow 10 hours catering to random new rules every few hours. :) Your solution is better, anyways. – Tyson Mar 13, 2009 at 22:28

Sorry about the new rules but they are really not random. I would like to put the table solution and css solution side-by-side on the same web page. I did try your code, looks great, but the position:absolute gave me problems. If I missed something, let me know. – Diogenes Mar 13, 2009 at 23:28

As long as the widths and heights are constant, one can always use absolute positioning to get the same effect. This should be obvious enough, so that I don't have to type it out (it's late here and I'm lazy :P)

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I took a slightly different approach than the "id everything" solutions I've seen so far. This comes in less than 100 chars more than the table based solution.

```html
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//E
  "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xml:lang="e
<head>
<title>The Challenge</title>
<style type="text/css">
div {
    position:absolute;
    width:35px;
    height:35px;
    text-align:center;
    line-height:35px
}

.spiral { width:175px; height:175px }

.t { top:0 }
.l { left:0 }
.r { right:0 }
.b { bottom:0 }
.w { width:140px }
.h { height:140px; line-height:140px }
.c {
```

```
        top:35px;
        left:35px;
        width:105px;
        height:105px
}

.c .w { width:70px }
.c .h { height:70px; line-height: 70px }
.c .c { width:35px; height: 35px }
</style>
</head>
<body>
<div class="spiral">
    <div class="t l w" style="background-color:silver"
    <div class="t r h" style="background-color:maroon"
    <div class="b l h" style="background-color:navy">3
    <div class="c">
        <div class="t l w" style="background-color:red
        <div class="t r h" style="background-color:blu
        <div class="b l h" style="background-color:yel
        <div class="c">7</div>
        <div class="b r w" style="background-color:gre
    </div>
    <div class="b r w" style="background-color:orange"
</div>
</body>
</html>
```

Edit: Based on your modifications I'm posting a slightly more verbose but hopefully clearer solution that adds a black border, sets some text to white, and does not absolutely position the "garden".

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//E
    "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xml:lang="e
<head>
<title>The Challenge</title>
<style type="text/css">
div {
    position:absolute;
```

```
        width:35px;
        height:35px;
        text-align:center;
        line-height:35px
}

div.spiral {
        position:relative;
        width:175px;
        height:175px;
        border: 1px solid #000
}

.top { top:0 }
.left { left:0 }
.right { right:0 }
.bottom { bottom:0 }
.wide { width:140px }
.tall { height:140px; line-height:140px }
.center {
        top:35px;
        left:35px;
        width:105px;
        height:105px
}

.center .wide { width:70px }
.center .tall { height:70px; line-height: 70px }
.center .center { width:35px; height: 35px }
</style>
</head>
<body>
<div class="spiral">
        <div class="top left wide" style="background-color
        <div class="top right tall" style="background-colo
        <div class="bottom left tall" style="background-
color:navy;color:#fff">3</div>
        <div class="center">
                <div class="top left wide" style="background-c
                <div class="top right tall" style="background-
                <div class="bottom left tall" style="backgroun
                <div class="center">7</div>
                <div class="bottom right wide" style="backgrou
        </div>
```

```
        <div class="bottom right wide" style="background-c
</div>
</body>
</html>
```

edited Mar 13, 2009 at 7:58

answered Mar 12, 2009 at 1:17

Prestaul
85.1k ● 10 ● 88 ● 85

Minified my own answer and by my count it's 180 characters less than the table solution: 1042 (table) to 858 (mine) characters not counting body/head/style tags. – Sam Hasler Mar 12, 2009 at 2:53

The floating solution is very elegant and compact, nice work Sam. I was going for something more in the spirit of css. This solution could be used to put multiple "tiles" on the same page without duplicating the css and I'm hoping that it is readable and easy to comprehend. – Prestaul Mar 12, 2009 at 14:04

I like your JSBin link, so I've put a version of my code with two tiles out there if anyone wants to play with it: jsbin.com/avive – Prestaul Mar 12, 2009 at 14:20

This is an interesting approach too, though I am having a little difficulty following it. Can you change your class names to something that better expresses intent? No penalty for the few extra characters but big points if the class names express intent and help in understanding. – Diogenes Mar 12, 2009 at 20:22

Ok... I've update with a new version that has clearer class names and fulfills your other new requests. New version
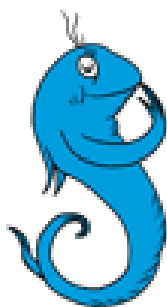
4

No one here has given a table solution yet, and The Challenge is all about comparing CSS layouts to Table based layouts in a controlled (and heavily biased) scenario.

So here is Ted's Table Layout solution and his challenge...

"With my table based solution, it is very easy to add new inhabitants to the garden plots by very simple additions to the HTML markup only! All inhabitants are automatically centered and spaced in a pleasing style. For example:"

(source: sontag.ca)

(source: sontag.ca)

"As far as I can tell, no CSS based solutions here can accomodate new inhabitants without extensive renovations to the CSS rules."

"Better bring lots of money boys, I'm feeling really hungry and thirsty now."

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//E
    "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd"

<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml">
<head>
<title>Terrible Ted's Table Layout</title>
<style type="text/css">

#master TD { text-align: center }
#master {
  border: 1px solid black;
  font: italic 100%/200% 'Comic Sans MS', cursive;
}
#silver { background-color:silver }
#maroon { background-color: maroon;  color:white }
#navy { background-color:navy;  color:white }
#red { background-color: red }
#blue { background-color:blue;  color:white }
#yellow { background-color: yellow }
#green { background-color:green;  color:white }
#orange { background-color:orange }
#white { background-color:white }

#silver, #red, #green, #orange, #white { height: 35px
#maroon, #navy, #blue, #yellow, #white { width: 35px }

</style>
</head>
<body style="background-color:#ffb600">

<table id="master" border="0" cellpadding="0" cellspac
    summary="layoutByTable"><tr>
      <td id="silver" colspan="2" > 1 </td>
      <td id="maroon" rowspan="2" > 2 </td>
```

```
    </tr><tr>
    <td id="navy" rowspan="2" > 3 </td>
    <td>
      <table border="0" cellpadding="0" cellspacing="0"
        summary="inner"><tr>
          <td id="red" colspan="2" > 4 </td>
          <td id="blue" rowspan="2" > 5 </td>
        </tr><tr>
          <td id="yellow" rowspan="2" > 6 </td>
          <td id="white"> 7 </td>
        </tr><tr>
          <td id="green" colspan="2" > 8 </td>
        </tr>
      </table>
    </td>
  </tr><tr>
   <td id="orange" colspan="2"> 9 </td>
  </tr>
  </table>

</body>
</html>
```

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are you using
s to get the 2, 3 & 5 characters to appear on separate lines? when I just add them with whitespace to your html they appear on the same line. See jsbin.com/acoge – Sam Hasler Mar 13, 2009 at 14:00

Yup - that qualifies as simple markup, right? – Diogenes Mar 13, 2009 at 17:52

Single table solution.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Transitio
"http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-transitional.d
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xml:lang="e
    <head>
        <meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/
        <meta http-equiv="Content-language" content="e
        <title>The Challenge</title>
    </head>
    <body>

        <table cellspacing="0" cellpadding="0" border=
            <tr>
                <td colspan="4" height="35" align="cen
<i>1</i></td>
                <td rowspan="4" width="35" align="cent
<i>2</i></td>
                <td rowspan="5" valign="bottom"><img
src="http://sontag.ca/gif/grinch.gif" width="41" heigh
Grinch"/></td>
            </tr><tr>
                <td rowspan="4" width="35" align="cent
<i>3</i></td>
                <td colspan="2" height="35" align="cen
<i>4</i></td>
                <td rowspan="2" width="35" align="cent
<i>5</i></td>
            </tr><tr>
                <td rowspan="2" width="35" align="cent
<i>6</i></td>
                <td width="35" height="35" align="cent
            </tr><tr>
                <td colspan="2" height="35" align="cen
<i>8</i></td>
            </tr><tr>
                <td colspan="4" height="35" align="cen
<i>9</i></td>
            </tr>
        </table>
```

```
      </body>
  </html>
```

It is valid XHTML 1.0 Transitional and I've included Dr. Suess character :)

By stripping `Dr. Suess character`, the `<?xml` declaration, the `meta-tags` and the `summary` attribute you could cut it down to 929 characters and still be valid XHTML 1.0 Transitional.

Edit

As requested, XHTML 1.0 Strict

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//E
"http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xml:lang="e
    <head>
        <title>The Challenge</title>
        <style type="text/css">
            BODY {background: orange}
            #garden {border: 1px solid black; color: b
            #garden TD {
                font: italic 100% 'Comic Sans MS', cur
                height: 35px;
                padding: 0;
                text-align: center;
                width: 35px
            }
            #c1 {background: silver}
            #c2 {background: maroon; color: white}
            #c3 {background: navy;   color: white}
            #c4 {background: red}
            #c5 {background: blue;   color: white}
            #c6 {background: yellow}
            #c7 {background: white}
            #c8 {background: green;  color: white}
```

```
            #c9 {background: orange}
        </style>
    </head>
    <body>

        <table id="garden" cellspacing="0">
            <tr>
                <td id="c1" colspan="4">1</td>
                <td id="c2" rowspan="4">2</td>
            </tr><tr>
                <td id="c3" rowspan="4">3</td>
                <td id="c4" colspan="2">4</td>
                <td id="c5" rowspan="2">5</td>
            </tr><tr>
                <td id="c6" rowspan="2">6</td>
                <td id="c7">7</td>
            </tr><tr>
                <td id="c8" colspan="2">8</td>
            </tr><tr>
                <td id="c9" colspan="4">9</td>
            </tr>
        </table>

    </body>
</html>
```

970 non-whitespace characters, orange background, Dr. Suess's Grinch removed.

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height, width and align attributes are not valid in XHTML. You need to specify these as separate CSS rules. It'll be a good

exercise. See Ted's Table answer for tips on this.
– Diogenes Mar 13, 2009 at 10:02

I'm curious about a what single table solution might reduce to when done as XHTML strict. – Diogenes Mar 13, 2009 at 10:05

Width and Height attributes are valid in Transitional. This one is not meant to be a solutions to your chalenge, but rather a single table example. That is why I did not use *any* css. Others are free to work it into strict :) – Jacco Mar 13, 2009 at 10:06

@Jacco - hey your new version cleaned up real good! So I concede to you on the table solution - yours is better. But I somehow think neither of our table solutions are going to win any votes here ;-) – Diogenes Mar 14, 2009 at 14:12

The 'right' solution depends entirely on the nature of the data to be displayed, is it tabular or not. (if it is visual only, Peter Boughton solutions is hard to beat) – Jacco Mar 14, 2009 at 16:11

Brevity of markup....

2

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//E
"http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xml:lang="e
<head>
<title>The Challenge</title>
<style type="text/css">
    .garden {
        position: relative;
        width: 175px;
        height: 175px;
        font-family: 'Comic Sans MS', cursive;
        border: 1px solid;
        color: #000;
```

```css
        }
.garden div {
    position: absolute;
    width: 35px;
    height: 35px;
    line-height: 35px;
    text-align: center;
    }
.garden div:first-child {
    width: 140px;
    background: silver;
    }
.garden div:first-child + div {
    right: 0;
    height: 140px;
    line-height: 140px;
    color: #fff;
    background: maroon;
    }
.garden div:first-child + div + div {
    top: 35px;
    height: 140px;
    line-height: 140px;
    color: #fff;
    background: navy;
    }
.garden div:first-child + div + div + div {
    top: 35px;
    left: 35px;
    width: 70px;
    background: red;
    }
.garden div:first-child + div + div + div + div {
    top: 35px;
    right: 35px;
    height: 70px;
    line-height: 70px;
    background: blue;
    }
.garden div:first-child + div + div + div + div +
    top: 70px;
    left: 35px;
    height: 70px;
    line-height: 70px;
```

```
            background: yellow;
            }
    .garden div:first-child + div + div + div + div +
            top: 70px;
            left: 70px;
            background: white;
            }
    .garden div:first-child + div + div + div + div +
            top: 105px;
            left: 70px;
            width: 70px;
            background: green;
            }
    .garden div:first-child + div + div + div + div +
            bottom: 0;
            right: 0;
            width: 140px;
            background: orange;
            }

    </style>
</head>
<body>
<div class="garden">
<div>1</div>
<div>2</div>
<div>3</div>
<div>4</div>
<div>5</div>
<div>6</div>
<div>7</div>
<div>8</div>
<div>9</div>
</div>
</body>
</html>
```

link

answered Mar 13, 2009 at 0:55

Andy Ford

Interesting approach, but this won't work in IE6... – Prestaul Mar 13, 2009 at 8:00

Yeah, just wanted to spice things up a little – Andy Ford Mar 13, 2009 at 14:42

You can shorten your markup even further by using the "content: ';'" CSS rule, too. – Tyson Mar 13, 2009 at 21:35

@Tyson - technically true, but presentation belongs in the CSS and content belongs in the HTML. @Presthaul - running with the 'garden' metaphor... I wouldn't want to plant my garden in such bad soil anyway – Andy Ford Apr 28, 2009 at 20:01

1

I think we've proved that there's more than one way to do this. The `table` tag and CSS are both viable options.

Rather than add another way to complete the challenge I'd just like to say that, whether it's easier or harder, simpler or more complex: **tables in HTML should be used for displaying tabular data.**

- Tables are **made** for tabular data.
- CSS is **made** for styling/presentation.

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answered Apr 28, 2009 at 19:15

Travis
12.4k ● 8 ● 43 ● 53

(source:)

I first did this exercise a little over 2 years ago when I was first learning HTML and CSS. My first solution was like the one you see here, except without the anonymous container DIVs. Then I got this idea for a web page that did a side by side comparison of CSS to a Table to prove CSS was better. So I worked on The Challenge page, published it, and then posted this question.

Sam Hasler posted an answer within minutes, it seems, that was really close. I could see he was on track for a better solution than what I had. All his divs were in order, and mine were not. **Jacco** posted a comment asking why I used two nested tables when one would do. He was right too, of course.

So I had two *Homer Simpson* **"Doh!"** moments right away. I read other questions and answers on tables vs. CSS. Someone mentioned that tables centered vertically. My answer did not center vertically either, but I thought it might be possible. The whole point, after all, is to do everything a table can do and better. I had painted myself into a corner by now, looking like a fool, so I *had* to find an answer.

Eventually (am embarrassed to say how long it was) I came up with the solution below. I was then able to fulfill my original concept of a side-by-side comparison web page.

Here is an explanation of how it all works and why [you should use CSS](#)

Charlie's answer...

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//E
  "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">

<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml">
<head>
<title>Charlie's CSS layout</title>
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html;cha
<style type="text/css">

#outer {
  width:175px; height:175px;
  text-align:center;
  font: italic 100%/200% 'Comic Sans MS', cursive;
  border: 1px solid black;
}
#inner { width: 105px }
#outer>DIV, #inner>DIV { float:left }
#outer>DIV>DIV, #inner>DIV>DIV
{ display: table-cell;  vertical-align: middle }
#c2 { clear: right }
#c3, #c6 { clear: left }

#c1>DIV, #c4>DIV, #c7>DIV, #c8>DIV, #c9>DIV { height:
#c2>DIV, #c3>DIV, #c5>DIV, #c6>DIV, #c7>DIV { width:
#c2>DIV, #c3>DIV { height: 140px }
#c1>DIV, #c9>DIV { width:  140px }
#c5>DIV, #c6>DIV { height:  70px }
#c4>DIV, #c8>DIV { width:   70px }
#c2, #c6, #c7, #c8, #c9 { position:relative; top:-35px
```

```
#c9 { left: 35px }

#c1 { background-color: silver }
#c2 { background-color: maroon; color: white }
#c3 { background-color: navy; color: white }
#c4 { background-color: red }
#c5 { background-color: blue; color: white }
#c6 { background-color: yellow }
#c7 { background-color: white }
#c8 { background-color: green; color: white }
#c9 { background-color: orange }

/* these rules are a HACK to center vertically in IE7
#outer>DIV>DIV, #inner>DIV>DIV { position:relative; }
#c1>DIV, #c4>DIV, #c7>DIV, #c8>DIV, #c9>DIV { top: 10%
#c5>DIV { top: 0% }
#c6>DIV { top: 30% }
#c2>DIV { top: 0% }
#c3>DIV { top: 15% }

</style>
</head>
<body>

<div id="outer">
  <div id="c1"><div> 1 </div></div>
  <div id="c3"><div>3<br/>3<br/>3</div></div>
  <div id="inner">
    <div id="c4"><div> 4 </div></div>
    <div id="c5"><div> 5<br/>5 </div></div>
    <div id="c6"><div> 6 </div></div>
    <div id="c7"><div> 7 </div></div>
    <div id="c8"><div> 8 </div></div>
  </div>
  <div id="c2"><div> 2<br/>2<br/>2<br/>2 </div></div>
  <div id="c9"><div> 9 9 9</div></div>
</div>

</body>
</html>
```

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Glorfindel
22.6k ● 13 ● 89 ● 116

answered Mar 14, 2009 at 3:31

Diogenes
1,153 ● 12 ● 18

kudos for getting vertical-align: middle to work, I tried and failed. – Sam Hasler Mar 14, 2009 at 11:55

Hmmm, using CSS to declare a DIV to be handled as if it was a table because you do not want to use a table... Feels like chasing your own tail. – Jacco Mar 14, 2009 at 13:59

1   No, I wanted a DIV to center content vertically, a perfectly reasonable thing to ask for. My preference for using tables (or not) has nothing to do a with a need to center something in a box. – Diogenes Mar 14, 2009 at 14:21

Those hacks for vertical align aren't working for me in IE7. (I'm on vista if that makes a difference) – Sam Hasler Mar 14, 2009 at 19:19

The IE hacks won't automatically center content as the content changes and to be honest, I have no idea what how they work. If Vista is different, it would not be a big surprise. – Diogenes Mar 15, 2009 at 4:31

Here is an example that doesn't use absolute positioning, doesn't use table-cell, and is valid in IE6-8, FF, etc.

0

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//E
        "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xml:lang="e
  <head>
    <meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html
```

```html
<title>Terrible Ted's Table Layout</title>
<style type="text/css">
#box{border:1px solid #000; width:175px; height:175px;
family:"Comic Sans MS"; font-size:13px; font-style:ita

div {float:left}

#c1, #c3, #c4, #c7, #c8, #c9{height:35px; line-height:
#c2, #c3{height:140px;line-height:140px}
#c5, #c6{height:70px; line-height:70px}

#c1, #c9{width:140px}
#c2, #c3, #c5, #c6, #c7{width:35px}
#c4, #c8{width:70px}

#c6, #c7 {margin-top:-35px}

#c1{background-color:silver}
#c2{background-color:maroon; float:right}
#c3{background-color:navy}
#c4{background-color:red}
#c5{background-color:blue}
#c6{background-color:yellow}
#c7{background-color:white}
#c8{background-color:green}
#c9{background-color:orange}

</style>
</head>
<body>
<div id="box">
<div id="c1">1</div>
<div id="c2">2</div>
<div id="c3">3</div>
<div id="c4">4</div>
<div id="c5">5</div>
<div id="c6">6</div>
<div id="c7">7</div>
<div id="c8">8</div>
<div id="c9">9</div>
</div>
```

```
    </body>
</html>
```

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