

## Portland Nursery - Fall and Winter Containers - September 2011

### Updating [Summer Containers](#) for [Fall](#) and [Winter](#) Interest

Summer is behind us and our annual containers are likely starting to look pretty tired. Impatiens may be leggy, potato vines may be tattered from dry weather and bugs may have had their day with our petunias. The question is where do we go from here in order to freshen up our hanging baskets and pots for fall and winter.

To start, let's make a distinction between fall and winter containers. Fall containers can be an editing and refreshing of those we've had for summer. In other words, some plants in your basket may look just fine to continue through fall, in addition to adding some new plants. Winter, however, due to the cold, will likely require a complete renovation of your container. The time to keep in mind is late October to mid-November when Portland gets consistent cold nights with frost. This is the time when all summer annuals and many fall color plants will die or look yucky and at this point a transition to winter interest plants can begin.

So, what now? For fall, peruse your container and do an assessment of what looks good and what looks terrible. Certainly take out anything that looks dead or miserable. On the other hand, if a plant looks borderline a little deadheading and cutting off of old leaves and branches may revive it just fine. Remember the old adage of thrillers (your centerpiece), fillers (the fluff in your container) and spillers (plants that trail over the edge of the pot) in your container and if you remove one in that category from summer just replace it with another for fall. Our list, below, offers some options. Plants for summer and fall can look great together. Think orange mums with ivory petunias. Still important, however, is considering the sun requirements of your plants. A pot in shade will still need shade plants and a container in sun will still need sun tolerant plants.

Fertilizing is still important for maintaining fall and winter interest containers. Use liquid fertilizer if your container is already potted up. If you are building a container from scratch mix in a good organic starter fertilizer like E.B. Stone *Sure Start* or a time release fertilizer like Osmocote. In addition, when putting new plants into old holes in your container, add new potting soil. Think of it as a refresh. New potting soil has fertilizer in it that is quickly available to your plants. Further, a quick top dressing of potting soil on top of your updated container is also beneficial as a long summer has likely compacted what is already there. Also, don't be scared about making new plants fit into holes where old plants have been removed. A new plant in a four inch pot can be nicely tucked into an old hole with some adjustment and be fine. Just be sure to water the new plant and the rest of the pot well after it is potted-up.

Once first frost hits in October or November and the annuals and perennials in your pot have melted or died back, it is time to redo your container in its entirety. There are numerous evergreen plant options that look wonderful in pots and hanging baskets throughout the winter season. Evergreen plants are those that stay green year round. Examples of great evergreens for pots include dwarf conifers, Hellebores, evergreen ferns and grasses, Heathers and Hebes. In addition, evergreen groundcovers make fantastic spillers for pots. Please see the following list for ideas and possible combinations.

When planting your winter interest container always use new potting soil and mix a fertilizer like *Sure Start* directly into your potting soil before you plant. Other considerations include protecting your pots from the cold weather. When the very coldest weather hits a couple of options exist. First, you can line your containers up or group them together against your house to protect them from the wind. Or, during the coldest days, you can put them in your basement or garage. If the winter cold does kill one of your plants and you end up having a hole in your container get creative. Pinecones, branches, moss, little statuary, rocks, holiday ornaments and even bows make wonderful fillers for the winter season.

In addition, watering needs during winter are a lot less than during the summer, so be careful not to overwater your containers. Also, unlike during the warm months, pests attacking your plants will not be much of an issue as most are dead or dormant. Finally, because of our gray winters, containers for winter can include a

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mix of plants that prefer sun and shade, thus affording a wider plant palette for your selection. That is why our list of winter interest plants is not divided into sun and shade.

Worth noting is that some of the plants recommended for containers may eventually outgrow the confines of your pot, but will happily work in a larger pot or can be transplanted into the garden. All of them will get you through at least one season before changes will be necessary. Also, many of the plants listed below come in four inch pot sizes which are easiest to work with when building a container.

### Plants for Fall Interest

Sun Thrillers	Sun Fillers	Sun Spillers
<a href="#">Dahlia</a>	Euphorbia 'Diamond Frost'	Helianthemum (many varieties)
Cordyline/ Dracena	Pansies and Violas	Muehlenbeckia
Ornamental Peppers	Mums and Asters	Creeping Thyme
Millet	Dusty Miller	Prostrate Rosemary
<a href="#">Rudbeckia hirta (many varieties)</a>	Ornamental Cabbage & Kale	Oregano 'Kent's Beauty'
Pennisetum 'Moudry' or 'Hameln'		Ceratostigma plumbaginoides
Salvia 'Hot Lips'		
Salvia 'Black and Blue'		

Shade Thrillers	Shade Fillers	Shade Spillers
Dracaena	<a href="#">Cyclamen</a>	Vinca minor and Vinca major
<a href="#">Carex 'Ice Dance'</a>	Acorus	Gaultheria procumbens
<a href="#">Sword Fern</a>	Liriope spicata and muscari	Lysimachia nummularia
<a href="#">Euphorbia 'Tasmanian Tiger'</a>	<a href="#">Ophiopogon</a>	Ajuga reptans
Japanese Anemone	<a href="#">Heuchera/Heucherella</a>	
Fuchsia	Pansies and Violas	
Cimicifuga		

## Plants for Winter Interest

Thrillers	Fillers	Spillers
Erysimum (many varieties)	<a href="#">Cyclamen</a>	Cotoneaster dammeri
<a href="#">Nandina domestica</a>	<a href="#">Bergenia (many varieties)</a>	Ajuga reptans
Euonymous 'Greenspire'	<a href="#">Heuchera/ Heucherella/ Tiarella</a>	Muehlenbeckia
<a href="#">Camellia sasanqua 'Yuletide'</a>	<a href="#">Lonicera nitida</a>	Euonymous fortunei
<a href="#">Hellebore (many varieties)</a>	Hebe (many varieties)	<a href="#">Vaccinium macrocarpon</a>
Libertia	<a href="#">Calluna and Erica</a>	<a href="#">Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</a>
Coprosma	Liriope spicata and muscari	Creeping Rosemary
<a href="#">Euphorbia (many varieties)</a>	<a href="#">Ophiopogon</a>	<a href="#">Creeping Thyme</a>
<a href="#">Phormium</a>	Carex testacea	<a href="#">Vaccinium moupinense</a>
<a href="#">Evergreen Trees</a>	<a href="#">Epimedium</a>	<a href="#">Vaccinium vitis-idaea</a>
Poncirus trifoliata 'Flying Dragon'	Acorus	
Corokia cotoneaster	<a href="#">Deer Fern, Sword Fern, Autumn fern</a>	
Evergreen Grasses	Lavender	
Upright Rosemary	Sarcococca humilis	