https://www.freemag.ir

NEW

Pots & Planters GARDENING GUIDE

Liven up your outdoor space with stunning containers all year round

116 PAGES of tips & tricks

EMBRACE THE ART OF **THRILLER, FILLER, SPILLER** FOR BEAUTIFUL DISPLAYS





PLANT IDEAS FOR EVERY SEASON

CONTAINER CROPS

PREVENT PESTS



Digital Edition

FUTURE

FOURTH EDITION

Welcome to

Pots & Planters
GARDENING GUIDE

Keep your outdoor space looking stunning all year round with our guide to creating colourful containers! From bright blooms in spring to the fiery foliage of winter, we'll share with you our favourite recipes for stunning displays, whatever the weather.

Elsewhere, we've also got all the expert advice you could possibly need to get started with pots and planters, from the different materials available and what plants work best in them, to natural ways to keep those pesky pests at bay.

If you prefer to challenge yourself to create your own displays, we've got you covered. As well as a potting template to achieving striking schemes, we'll share with your our picks of the best plants for pots, whether that's a pint-sized planter for a windowsill or balcony, or a towering tub for a patio.









Contents

MAINTAIN YOUR POTS

6 EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT POTS
We dish the dirt on humanity's favourite plant container

14 MAKE YOUR POTS A HOME
To turn your container into a plant's idea of paradise, you'll need to get the drainage and potting mix just right

20 TAKE CONTROL OF PESTS
Don't let the unwanted attention of pests ruin your pot paradise – learn how to identify and limit the impact of common plant predators

30 THE SECRET TO DAZZLING DISPLAYS
Employ the theory of thriller, filler and spiller to achieve stunning results whatever container, season or aspect you are working in

SEASONS

34 PLAN AHEAD FOR SPRING
Fill pots with colour to brighten up your Spring garden

38 SPRING TO LIFE!
Perk up your patio with these amazing pots, which are packed with all of the best plants of the season

44 POTS OF SUMMER STYLE
Have your patio bursting with colour with these beautiful seasonal ideas

48 SUMMER POT RECIPES
These four beautiful containers can be planted up early and will get better and better over the season

54 SUMMER CONTAINERS
This seasonal pot pot inspo is ideal for creating a vibrant spot on your patio for the summer months

60 TIME FOR BULBS
Don't miss out on planting up one more of these both displays in Alton for fabulous display to look forward to next year

68 LAST-MINUTE COLOUR
Give your garden a final burst of colour with these late-season pots

74 HARDY BEAUTIES
We have six recipes for eye-catching containers that are sure to bring you good cheer in the darkest time of year

82 POTTED BLUES
This flexible wall display can be planted to fit any available space you have on a wall or fence

84 10 BEST CONTAINERS FOR WINTER
Choose a mix of these varieties to create a stunning winter pot















PROJECTS

86 GROW VEG IN POTS
You don't need a huge garden to enjoy homegrown veg – discover how to grow a plentiful supply in pots

88 PLANT A TIERED HERB PLANTER
Transform a plain planter into a unique piece for your garden

90 MAKE COLOURFUL OIL DRUM PLANTERS
Try an easy upcycling project and turn tatty old metal drums into a fun and colourful container garden



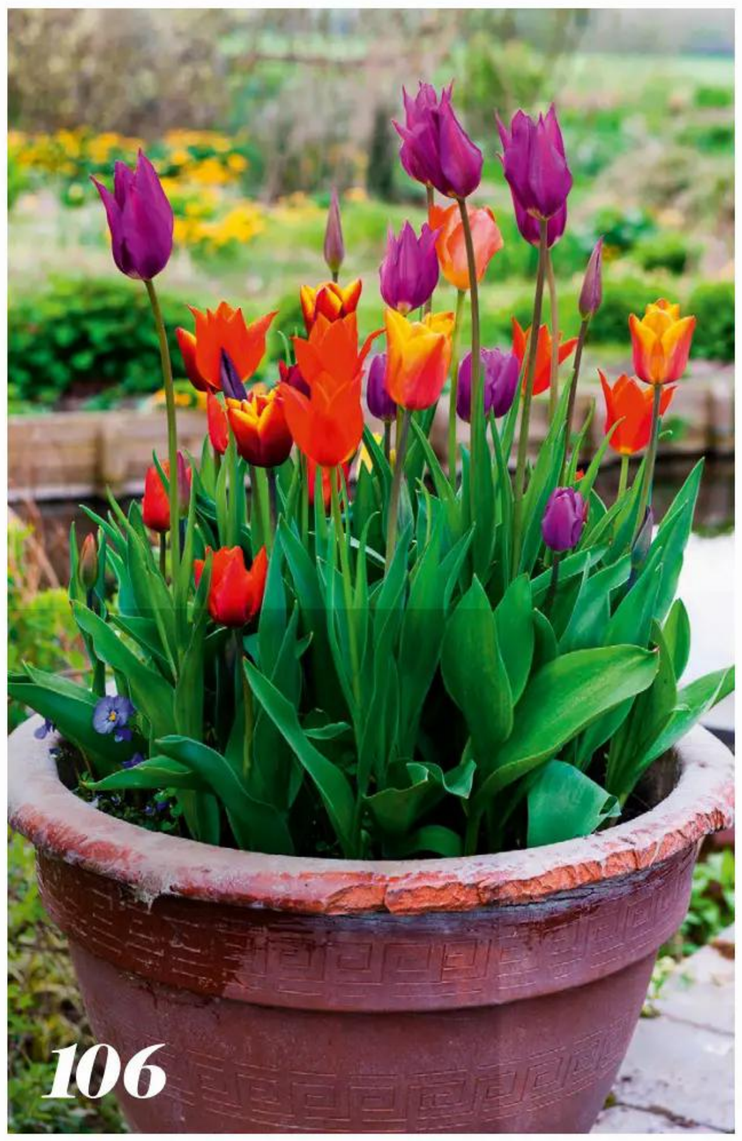
POT STYLE

92 IDEAS FOR HANGING BASKETS
These fresh looks reinvent the classic cottage garden accessory for contemporary spaces

96 25 BEST BALCONY PLANTS
Choose easy to care for plants for a low maintenance mini plant paradise

102 COOL & CONTEMPORARY CONTAINERS
These on-trend planters in shades of grey are just the thing to take you right through the colder months and into spring

106 25 BEST PATIO PLANTS
These top performers will keep your outside space looking fabulous every month of the year



© Getty Images, Alamy

Everything you need to know about POTS

We dish the dirt on everyone's favourite plant container



Plant pots are simple containers with hidden technical depths. Which ones you choose will have far-reaching impacts on your garden.

All plants differ to some extent – and the same can be said of pots. Crucially, one pot may drain of water faster than another, depending on its material, size and design. A terracotta pot will probably drain more freely than a plastic one. But any pot with inadequate drainage holes will struggle to drain at all. Whatever the reasons behind a pot's slow or rapid drainage, that movement of water will influence which plants, if any, the pot can keep happy.

While drainage is important to potted plants, so too is water retention. This is the ability of the compost or potting mix to hold moisture when it is not in a saturated state. The very material of a pot may promote or discourage water retention, and this in turn will affect the opportunity for roots to take up water. When choosing a pot to suit a plant, we need to consider these factors, as well as other points of difference such as a pot's size, weight and effects on soil temperature.

Of course, appearances matter too. Picking pots to complement your garden design is largely subjective, but there's plenty of inspiration to be found in places such as RHS and National Trust gardens, your local garden centre, and the pages of this book. Pay attention to where other gardeners have put their pots – near boundaries, on stands, hung from walls, and so on – and decide which combinations of pot, plant and position are most pleasing to your eye.



Terracotta

These earthenware pots made from moulded, fired clay are probably the first image that springs to mind when you think about plant pots. Terracotta has been a popular plant pot material since ancient times, and it remains a firm favourite in the present day for both utilitarian and ornate styles of pot.

Pros

- Whether you're looking for new terracotta pots or antiques, a superb variety are available to buy online and in shops.
- Porous material helps with drainage and movement of air.
- Timelessly attractive style.

Cons

- Can be susceptible to frost damage.
- May drain water too freely for moisture-loving plants.

Pairs well with

Lavender, rosemary, bay

Glazed ceramic

Like a terracotta pot, glazed ceramic pots are made of clay. There's an important difference, however, in that glazed ceramic pots have a coat of lacquer on their surface. Glazed ceramic pots are often made in bold, attractive colours, or with expressive, artistic patterns.

Pros

- Very good moisture retention due to the glazed outer layer.
- Heavy material keeps large plants stable in windy conditions.
- Beautiful designs available.

Cons

- May hold too much moisture for some plants, leading to root rot.
- Unsuitable for aerating the potting mix or soil.
- The material is highly prone to breakage when dropped or knocked.

Pairs well with

Ferns, sage, tulips



Galvanised metal

Rust-resistant, galvanised metal plant pots can make a hardy, attractive addition to your potted plant displays. There's a lot of variety within this category of pot – iron or steel, antique or contemporary, purpose-built or recycled, and so on. Metal plant pots should be used with caution, as they can easily overheat.

Pros

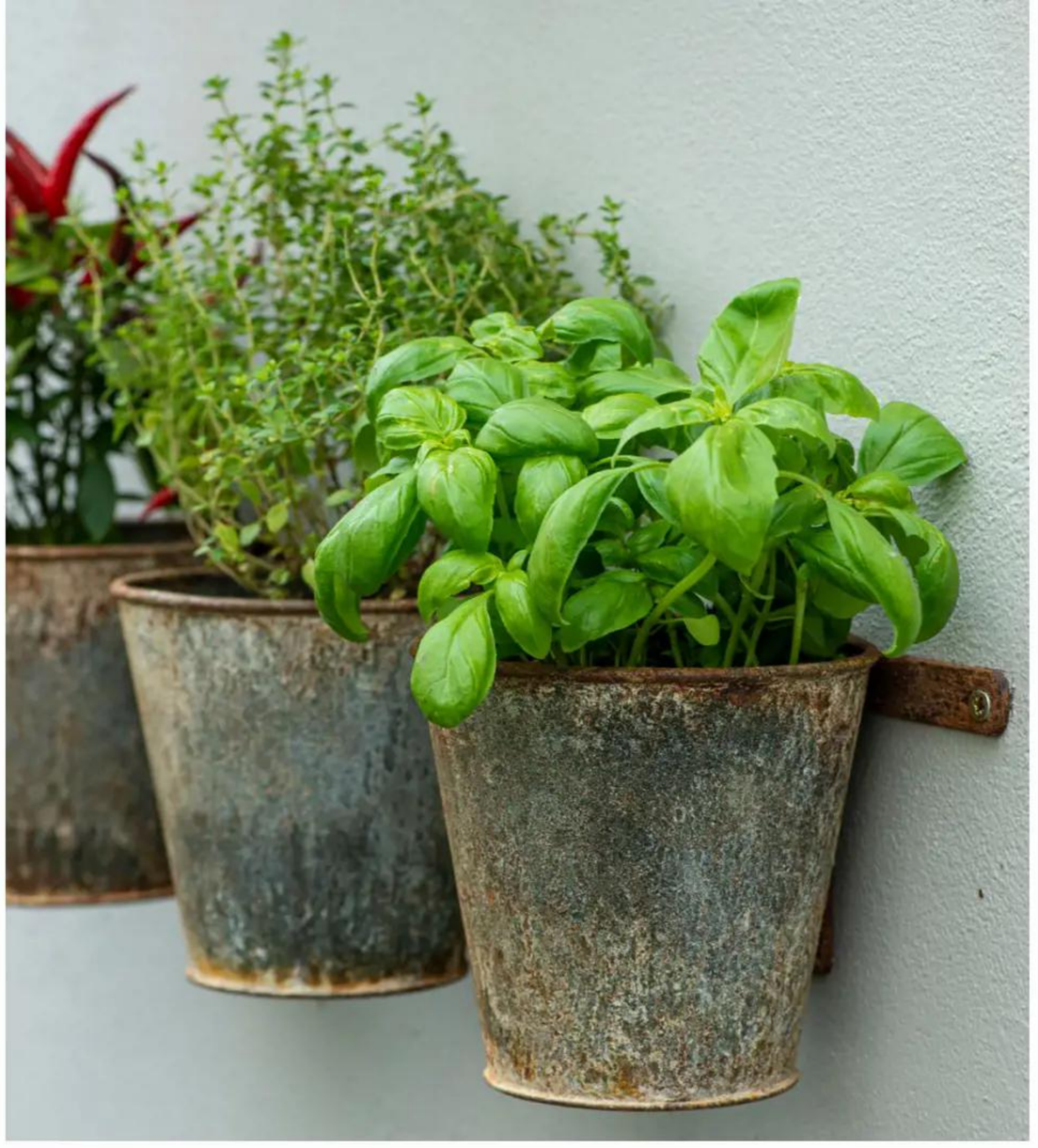
- Extremely strong and durable, with excellent resistance to cracks, chips and scratches.
- Charming appearance.
- Often reasonably priced.

Cons

- Risk of damaging the plant and potting mix through overheating.
- Depending on the effectiveness of galvanisation, rusting may occur on the inside of the pot and spread to the plant.

Pairs well with

Campanulas, chives, geums





Plastic or resin

A huge variety of plant pots are made from plastic or resin, ranging from the ultra-cheap nursery pots often used for transporting young plants, to chic and stylish statement pots. Most examples are inexpensive and practical, with plenty of drainage holes in the base.

Pros

- Excellent drainage provision usually means there will be little or no need for adjustments during pot prep.
- Extremely durable, perfect for multiple reuses.
- Often cheap and practical.

Cons

- The non-porous material is a poor match for plants vulnerable to overwatering.
- Typically not the most attractive type of plant pot, although there are some decorative options out there.

Pairs well with

Astrantias, persicarias, hostas

Concrete or stone

Plant pots made of concrete and stone can bring a clean, modern aesthetic to your outdoor space. Most of them come in neutral shades, such as grey or off-white, which reflect the raw materials. Many concrete and stone pots are cylindrical or right-angled, although more traditional flared forms can also be found.

Pros

- As concrete and stone are naturally porous, they tend to provide good drainage and airflow.
- Attractive, minimal style.
- May contain lime, especially in the case of concrete pots. This is a plus for plants that like alkaline soil.

Cons

- Sealing the pot may preserve its appearance over time – but this comes at the cost of reducing its naturally beneficial porosity.
- Heavier than other plant pot types.
- Highly prone to breakage when dropped or knocked.

Pairs well with

Begonias, orchids, oregano



Hanging basket

A hanging basket is any basket-like plant container that hangs from a structure. While designs differ, most hanging baskets feature an outer grid, an inner lining, and a support structure such as a hook and chain. Many small plants can do well in a hanging basket – especially trailing plants.

Pros

- Makes great use of outdoor space while cheering up the appearance of a building or wall.
- The perfect home for trailing plants.
- Keeps plants safe from ground-based pests.

Cons

- Can be difficult to reach and maintain, depending on placement.
- Poor water retention can lead to underwatering of plants, or a demanding watering schedule for the gardener.

Pairs well with

Fuchsias, pansies, ivy



Wooden

While small-to-medium-sized wooden plant pots are rare, larger pots and planters are commonly made from this most garden-appropriate of materials. Wooden pots often have a cuboidal shape, although some round-topped examples are made by recycling a wooden barrel or pail. If you decide to use a wooden pot, add a plastic liner to reduce rotting.

Pros

- A beautiful, natural material that can blend in well with garden beds, or near tree bases.
- Highly durable, with great resistance to both cold and hot weather.
- You can paint the wood to suit your garden design.
- Excellent drainage.

Cons

- Risk of rot, especially if the wood is untreated.
- Limited options available for purchase.

Pairs well with

Thyme, roses, ox-eye daisies





What are nursery pots?

A special place for seedlings and cuttings

Nursery pots are small, inexpensive, plastic containers for accommodating plants during the early stages of growth. They have generous drainage holes on the base, and provide ample room for roots to grow. When a plant outgrows its nursery pot, you'll need to repot it in a container that's big enough to accommodate further growth. You can keep a used nursery pot to grow other seedlings or propagate plants – but you should sterilise it first.

Which pot to get

Careful consideration will help you to find the perfect pot for your plant and garden. Don't leave it to pot luck!

Think of all the plant pots you've seen, in gardens, at garden centres and on these very pages. They will surely vary in several important ways – especially their shape, their materials and their size. While these differences may appear largely aesthetic at first glance, they can be a life-and-death matter for plants.

Using a pot of an ill-suited size can seriously affect a plant's ability to grow and thrive. If the pot is too small for the plant, this worsens the risk of the plant becoming rootbound, with a tangled root network that will struggle to grow. On the other hand, an excessively large pot increases the risk of root rot, resulting from slow drying of the soil.

There are a few ways of measuring the size of a plant pot. Some pots are marketed based on their diameter – the measurement from edge to edge across the centre of the top of the pot. In other cases, they are described by their capacity, which is given in litres. Some antique terracotta pots bear numbers which refer to a traditional plant pot sizing system, from tiny 'nineties' and 'seventy-twos' to giant 'twos' and 'ones'. When buying a plant for potting, you should always aim to find out which size of pot will suit the plant best at different stages of its life cycle, then match it with a pot that fits,

From a financial perspective, it's best to buy pots that snugly fit your plants, rather than overly roomy ones. As well as (usually) being more expensive, a larger pot will also need more potting mix, which can be expensive in its own right.

The shape of a pot can also affect its suitability for different plant species. For example, some plants such as the tree houseleek (*Aeonium arboreum*) store water in their leaves, and they can therefore thrive in a shallow pot with little root space. Meanwhile, deep-rooted plants such as tomato plants and most fruit trees will do best in a deep pot.

As we discussed in the previous pages, different plant pot materials and types can also vary in their suitability for certain plants or uses. There's a perfect pot out there for every plant – but it takes some careful consideration to find that harmonious match.

Prepare a pot for planting

Five quick steps to prime your pot

Clean and sterilise

1 Plant pots can harbour various fungi, insects and minerals that harm plant health – especially if the pot has been used previously. So, remove any debris and wash with soapy water before use.

Check for drainage holes

2 While most pots will already have ample drainage holes in the base, some lack this critical feature. If necessary, add new holes using a drill with a material-appropriate drill bit (check online for how-to guides).

Perfect placement

3 Put your pot in the ideal location for the plant(s) that will live in it. Consider factors like the level of sunlight, exposure to rainfall and shelter from wind. Position a big pot before filling it, or it may become too heavy to move.

Line the pot (if applicable)

4 Some pots (especially terracotta ones) need a lining to prevent frost damage. Add a piece of resilient plastic that neatly fits the inside of the pot, with a drainage hole in the bottom.

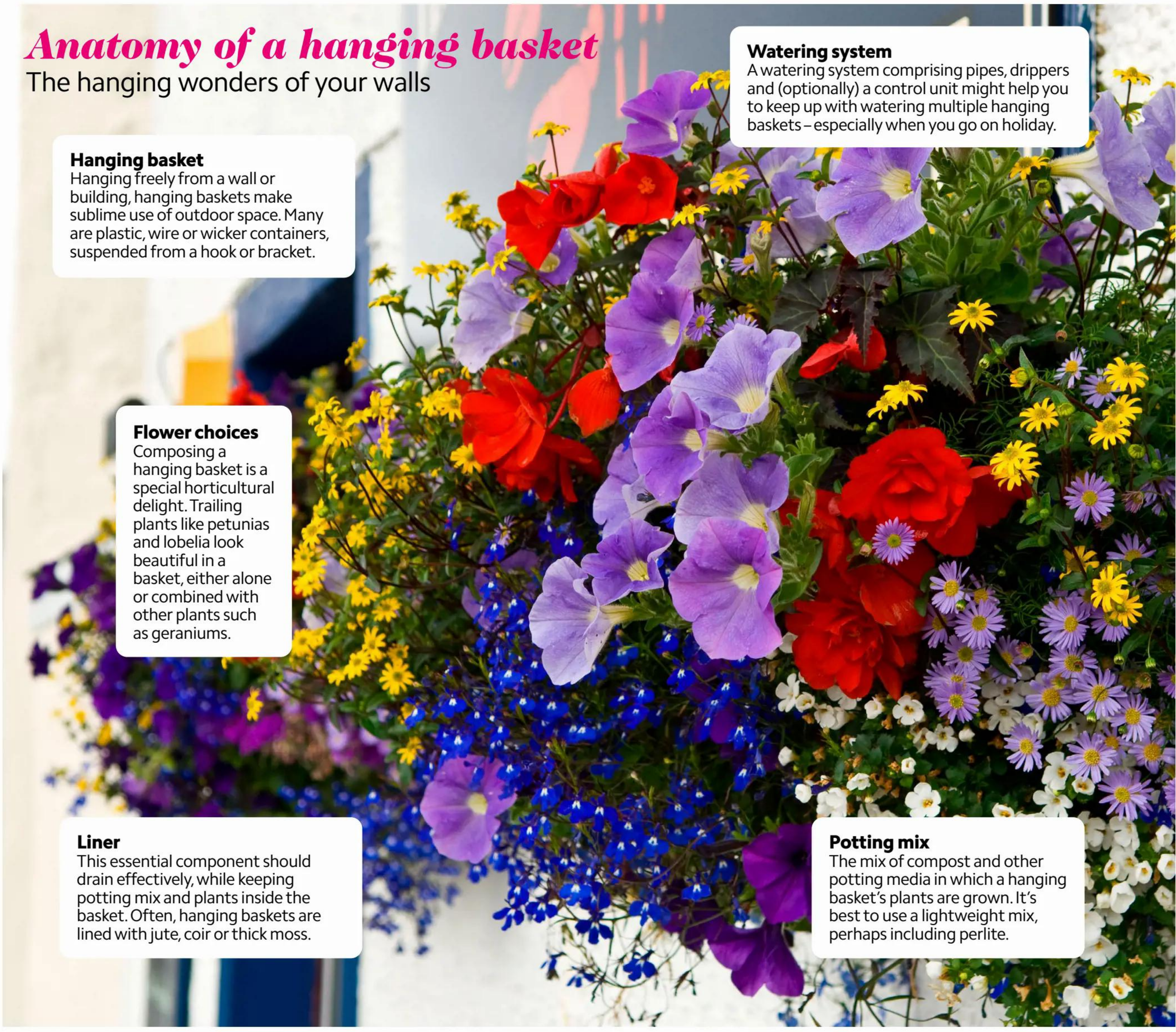
Add a drainage layer

5 Placing a layer of loose drainage materials in the bottom of a pot controls the rate of drainage through the drainage holes. Suitable materials include gravel, broken pot and polystyrene pieces.



Anatomy of a hanging basket

The hanging wonders of your walls



Where to buy plants for your pots

From independent shops to the biggest e-tailers

Plants are so widely sold, it can be difficult to decide where exactly to buy them. Garden centres are an obvious destination, with many providing a comprehensive range of plants, seeds, tools, ornaments and potting media like composts and mulches. Often, the employees will be able to give detailed advice on how to care for specific plants if you are unsure. Make a beeline for the staff member with the muckiest hands!

Plant nurseries have a more straightforward focus on selling plants. They are often great places to buy young plants at prime potting age. Do check that a nursery is open to the public before visiting, as some only sell wholesale to other businesses.

You can also find plants and seeds at many supermarkets, although the staff at these stores won't always be gardening specialists. Morrisons and Sainsbury's stores tend to stock a particularly good range of plants for the garden and home.

There are beautiful plants for sale at garden attractions, too. The varieties on offer will often reflect the specialisms of the gardeners. For instance, Stillingfleet Lodge Garden near York is renowned for its collection of pulmonarias, which can be viewed in the garden and purchased from the adjoining nursery.

You don't actually need to leave the house (or garden!) in order to procure the perfect plant. Excellent home delivery options are widespread, ranging from traditional mail-order catalogues to online retailers.

Call us old-fashioned, but we especially enjoy leafing through a printed plant catalogue. Most plant delivery services will be more than happy to send you a booklet filled with colourful photos of their plants. Of course, the internet offers more immediately available destinations for plant shopping. Popular online







options include Gardening Express, Crocus, and Gardening Direct.

Some highly specialised plant delivery services focus on just one species of plant, or one type of product. David Austin Roses and the bulb specialist Farmer Gracy are both excellent examples. Buying from a specialist is a good way to find rare or unique varieties. What's more, they can offer truly specialised customer support.

Plants belong to nature, and they needn't cost you any money at all. Sometimes a desirable plant will take root in a garden bed as a weed, and you can often pot up these visitors for a long-term stay. Our writer won the plant lottery this year, when a cherry tree appeared in his garden!

Another thrifty way to grow your collection is to ask friends or family for cuttings or seeds from their own plants, or new plants divided from their established perennials. You can return the favour once your own potted plants have matured.

Wherever you get your plants, always do a quick health check before you buy. Look for a spacious spread of roots, well-balanced above-ground growth, and healthy leaves and stems.

Also consider a plant's life stage: seed, juvenile or mature plant. Seeds are inexpensive, and they bring the mingled satisfactions and challenges of rearing a plant through its life cycle. Meanwhile, buying mature plants is a quick and easy, albeit expensive, path to populating your garden containers, with a good likelihood of plants surviving delivery and potting. Naturally, juvenile 'plug plants' fall somewhere in between.

Learn the lingo

It's easy to get tangled up in flowery language when you're reading about potted plants. Here are some handy horticultural terms to learn.

Annuals
Plants that grow and live for one growing season, such as sweet peas and sunflowers.

Biennials
Plants that grow and live for two years, flowering only in the second year.

Perennials
Plants that grow and live for more than two years, such as hollyhocks and geraniums.

Hardy
Describes a plant that can survive in low temperatures and frosty weather.

Half-hardy
Describes a plant that can survive moderately low temperatures, but it may succumb to frost.

Tender
Describes a plant that cannot survive in cold or very wet conditions.

Bulbs
Geophyte plants that grow from an underground storage organ, which is itself called a bulb.

Shrubs
Small-to-medium perennial plants with a permanent structure of woody stems.

Evergreen
A plant that retains green foliage and continuously photosynthesises over multiple growing seasons.

Deciduous
A plant that sheds its leaves annually and grows new ones the following year.

Herbaceous
A vascular plant that produces new, soft stems yearly, before dying back to the root.

Woody
A plant that produces stiff, woody stems that persist and grow for multiple years.

Rootbound
The state in which a plant's roots form into a dense, tangled mass, disrupting further growth.

Bareroot
In plant retail, the delivery of a dormant plant with no soil around the roots.

Deadheading
A type of pruning, with the aim of removing faded or dead flowers from a plant.

WORDS PETE WISE **PHOTOGRAPHS** ALAMY, GETTY, MARC ROSENBERG, NICOLA STOCKEN, TIM WINTER

Make your pots A HOME

To turn a container into a plant's idea of paradise, you'll need to get the drainage and potting mix just right

Before you pick out a plant and potting mix to put in a container, it's important to make sure the container is able to drain itself of water at a controlled rate.

Pots and other containers drain differently to garden beds. A functioning garden bed drains right down to the water table. In the UK, this is usually at least two metres below the surface, where permeable subsoils meet impermeable rock. Most containers offer far less depth for drainage – and what's more, they are filled with different potting materials which vary in their physical properties.

Inadequate drainage is a common problem for potted plants, leading to waterlogging in the worst cases. When the potting mix is saturated with water, roots struggle to get the oxygen they need for respiration. This can result in yellowing of the leaves, root rot and death of the plant.

Waterlogging can also put pots at risk. Excess moisture in the potting mix may freeze and expand over winter, resulting in frost damage to the container. 'Frost-proof' pots are at somewhat less of a risk.

Of course, excessive drainage is a bad thing too. When a pot drains rapidly, this can deprive the plant of water, which will usually lead to wilting, impaired photosynthesis and death. At the very least, a rapidly draining container will keep a diligent gardener busy with their watering can.

Each pot or container in your garden should be equipped to drain at just the right rate for your chosen plant and potting mix. Not too fast, not too slow.

3 shortcuts to adjust a container's drainage

DRAINAGE HOLES

Many plant containers have drainage holes in the base. These will often enable sufficient drainage, provided that the pot is either placed over a permeable layer such as gravel or soil, or raised slightly off the ground. You may encounter pots which don't have any drainage holes at all – for instance, upcycled pots or planters made from antique barrels. If this is the case, you'll need to add some holes for drainage. This can be done using a drill with a drill bit intended for the container's material type, but proceed with caution if the pot is fragile. Do some research before you get started to confirm the correct equipment and technique for your pot, and always wear protective gloves and googles.

ADDING GRAVEL OR CROCKS

If a pot is draining too rapidly or leaking soil through its drainage hole, you should be able to stem the flow by partially covering the hole with a hard material such as a stone or crock, inside the pot. Various household materials can be recycled for this purpose. You might also try using pieces of broken-up polystyrene as a great way to adjust drainage without adding excess weight.

GROUND CLEARANCE

Sometimes, helping a pot to drain more effectively is a simple case of elevating it off the ground, using items such as bricks, breezeblocks, or a purpose-made plant pot stand. This applies especially to flat-bottomed plant pots, or pots situated on an impermeable surface.



Top tip

Some pot types, like terracotta and clay, need to be soaked in water before you drill drainage holes. This softens the material, making it less likely to crack or break

Terracotta is a popular choice for pots as it is a porous material, promoting both air flow and drainage



Care tip

Be sure to clean your pots between uses (see p11). White stains on a pot indicate salt buildup, which can be removed by soaking in a solution of water and white vinegar

Get to know your plants

Plant species have evolved to flourish in particular conditions, in keeping with their natural distribution around the world. Some plants prefer dry soil, while others need more moisture. Some thrive in acidic soil. Others do well in 'heavy soil' which has high clay content. And while most plants want plenty of sunlight, some shade-loving plants need only an occasional glimmer. Each plant has its own set of natural needs – and it's your job to cater for them.

THE FIRST STEP IS TO LEARN ABOUT EACH NEW PLANT YOU ACQUIRE, IN PARTICULAR:

- ***Which potting materials does it like?***
- ***What size of pot or container is required, and when is repotting needed?***
- ***Is the plant light-loving or shade-loving?***
- ***What level of aeration do the roots need?***
- ***Are there any special requirements, such as a preference for alkaline soil?***

None of these questions are black and white. For instance, blue hydrangeas prefer acidic soil with a pH between 4 and 5, whereas pink hydrangeas prefer a more weakly acidic soil or neutral soil with a pH between 6 and 7. The more you learn about your various plants, the more you'll appreciate that every species will benefit from some special treatment.

There are plenty of sources you can use to find out about a specific plant. You could consult the packaging, ask the retailer, talk to green-fingered friends and family, or find the information online via a reputable source such as the RHS website.

Books can also be a superb resource for learning about plants' preferences. There are quite literally hundreds of books available devoted to container gardening, which can provide specific information about many commonly potted plant species. Search your local bookstore or online to find a title that fits your needs.

Do bear in mind that a plant's needs or preferences are likely to change during its life cycle. The seedling or cutting will often require different growing conditions to the mature plant.

It's all in the potting mix

If you're new to container gardening, you might expect your potting mix to contain soil. In fact, it's often better to use a soilless, compost-based potting mix.

Garden soil, which is any of a wide range of soils found in garden beds, is sometimes repurposed as 'potting soil' in plant pots, either on its own or mixed with other materials. While it's true that you can quickly and inexpensively fill containers with soil borrowed from the garden, we wouldn't recommend doing so, as garden soil can become highly compacted when used in a plant pot, leading to problems like waterlogging and low aeration. Even the nutrient-dense upper layer of 'topsoil' from a garden bed is typically a poor choice to use in a pot.

For potted plants, it's best to use a 'potting mix', typically made up of compost and optional extras such as vermiculite or bark chippings. All sorts of materials can be added to compost (or occasionally used on their own) to create the perfect potting mix for a particular plant or container. These 'potting media' serve various purposes, such as increasing the rate of drainage, improving water retention, fertilising compost or reducing its acidity. When you start carefully combining potting media to suit each potted plant, you'll elevate your container gardening far beyond a one-size-fits-all approach that's over-reliant on multi-purpose compost.

This is not to say compost isn't key. In most potting mixes, compost is the vital component, and the most prevalent material by volume. Its role is to deliver nutrients to the plant, while retaining moisture so that it can be absorbed by plant roots through osmosis. For many gardeners, a good multi-purpose compost will be the potting material they use the most. These versatile composts are made with a variety of partially decayed organic materials, providing suitable nutrition for a wide range of plants. Some multi-purpose composts come pre-mixed with other useful potting media, such as vermiculite or perlite.

For a few special categories of plant, an alternative type of compost is required to provide the best chance of healthy growth. This is especially true of ericaceous plants, carnivorous plants and cacti, all of which will do best in a specialised compost.

It's not just about putting the right materials in the pot. When using multiple potting media, you'll also need to consider how you layer or mix them. This will help you to achieve the desired rate of drainage and meet plants' needs – from insulation and nutrients to air and moisture.

If you're using a frost-prone pot made of a material such as unglazed clay, then the first thing to add is a plastic pot liner, with drainage holes cut in the bottom. You can then pour in your drainage layer, which could be made up of various materials such as gravel, broken pot, ripped up polystyrene or 'packing peanuts'.

Then comes the potting mix, and the plant itself. Some potting media such as vermiculite and horticultural lime should be mixed well into the compost or potting soil, so that they can deliver their benefits wherever roots will grow. Others, such as bark chippings, should be added on top of the potting mix as an upper layer of mulch. A few potting media require preparation before they are



Do a little research into what your plants need so you can keep them healthy and looking their best

added to a plant container. This is often the case with coco coir, which will need to be rehydrated before use if purchased as a dehydrated brick. It's a good idea to check the instructions on the packaging before you go ahead and pack a potting medium into the pot.

With so many factors to consider while preparing a plant's potting mix, it's easy to get things wrong. The consequences of using an ill-suited potting mix vary in their severity from plant-to-plant. High-maintenance plants will struggle to survive under imperfect conditions. For example, acid-loving azaleas do poorly in an alkaline potting mix, and are highly prone to the waterlogging that can occur in a slow-draining container. Meanwhile, hardy cistus can put up with a relatively wide range of drainage rates.

Whether a plant is fussy or hardy, you can help it to thrive by housing it in a tailor-made potting mix.



The type of surface you keep your pots on can also impact their drainage

Potting media 101

It takes a variety of potting materials to accommodate diverse plants



1 Compost (organic matter)

Compost is a mix of organic material used to enrich plants and soils with minerals and nutrients. It is the main ingredient in most potting mixes. You can make your own from garden and food waste, or you can buy it ready-made from garden centres or online. A peat-free multi-purpose compost is a good starting point for most potting mixes, but you may require special varieties for certain plants.



2 Perlite

Perlite is a naturally occurring mineral, found as a volcanic glass. When added to compost, its porous structure helps the potting mix to retain just enough water to stay moist, while allowing some drainage and aerating the compost. If you're growing a succulent or cactus from a stem or leaf cutting, perlite would be a perfect addition to the pot. As a rule of thumb, add one part perlite to four parts compost.



3 Vermiculite

Mixing vermiculite flakes into your compost makes it easier to quench the thirst of moisture-loving plants. This highly porous mineral absorbs water and nutrients, then releases them gradually over a period of days, providing a steady supply of hydration and nutrition. It also allows drainage and improves aeration. Vermiculite is sold in various flake sizes: the larger the plant, the larger the flakes should be.



4 Coco coir

Horticultural coco coir is a peat-resembling product made from the pith of coconut husk fibres. Combined with a nutritious compost, coir can be used to increase the rates of drainage and aeration in your potting mix. It works well as a mulch (surface layer) for plants that thrive in moist soil, such as hostas, hydrangeas and irises. Coir is often sold as a dehydrated brick, which will need to be rehydrated in a large container before use.



Stop, for peat's sake!

Peat moss makes a fantastic compost, with excellent drainage, aeration and moisture retention. It's a particularly effective choice for potting acid-loving plants such as camellias, nasturtiums and hydrangeas, thanks to its naturally low pH.

Unfortunately, the production of peat compost has adverse environmental effects. Peatlands are an important habitat for wildlife and a natural carbon sink. In the UK alone, 3.2 billion tons of carbon is locked up in peat. When compost producers drain peatlands and extract the peat, the habitat is degraded and carbon is released into the atmosphere.

Following many years of campaigning by various environmental groups, the UK government has announced that the sale of peat for amateur gardening use will be banned by 2024. Several major retailers, including B&Q and Co-op, have already stopped selling bagged gardening media that contains peat.

There are many peat-free composts that will equip you to grow beautiful plants, without so badly damaging nature elsewhere. Instead of a peat-based option, choose an alternative such as (peat-free) multi-purpose, ericaceous or carnivorous-plant compost, depending on what you plan to plant.



5 Bark

Tree bark chippings can be a useful material to add as the top layer of a plant's potting mix. They slowly release nutrients into the compost, and will improve moisture retention while allowing drainage, insulating the plant, and limiting weed growth. Bark products make a great potting medium for epiphytic plants, including various species of fern and orchid, which grow on other plants and trees in the wild.



6 Garden lime

Not to be confused with quicklime, garden lime (calcium carbonate) is a chemical commonly derived from limestone. Lime is used specifically to reduce the acidity of a soil. If you are using soil from your garden beds to fill pots or larger containers, it could be a good idea to check the soil's pH, and add some garden lime if the soil turns out to be too strongly acidic for your chosen plants.



7 Worm castings

Don't resent them for it, but your potted plants would appreciate nothing more than you going out and buying them a big sack of earthworm excreta. Muddy, crumbly worm castings are rich in humus, a dark, nutrient-rich soil which can improve the health and fertility of compost. Adding some castings around the base of a plant every now and then will deliver vitamins and minerals to the roots with subsequent waterings.



8 Sand

Horticultural sand is many gardeners' go-to option for increasing the rate of drainage in a potting mix. As any sandcastle architect will tell you, water passes through sand rapidly. While using too much sand will leave most plants parched, adding a moderate amount could 'fix' a slow-draining compost, or help you to achieve a high rate of drainage to suit dry-soil-loving plants like lavender, teasels and rosemary.

WORDS PETE WISE **PHOTOGRAPHS** ALAMY, DAN DUCHARS, GETTY, MARC ROSENBERG, MARK SCOTT, SHUTTERSTOCK

Take control of PESTS

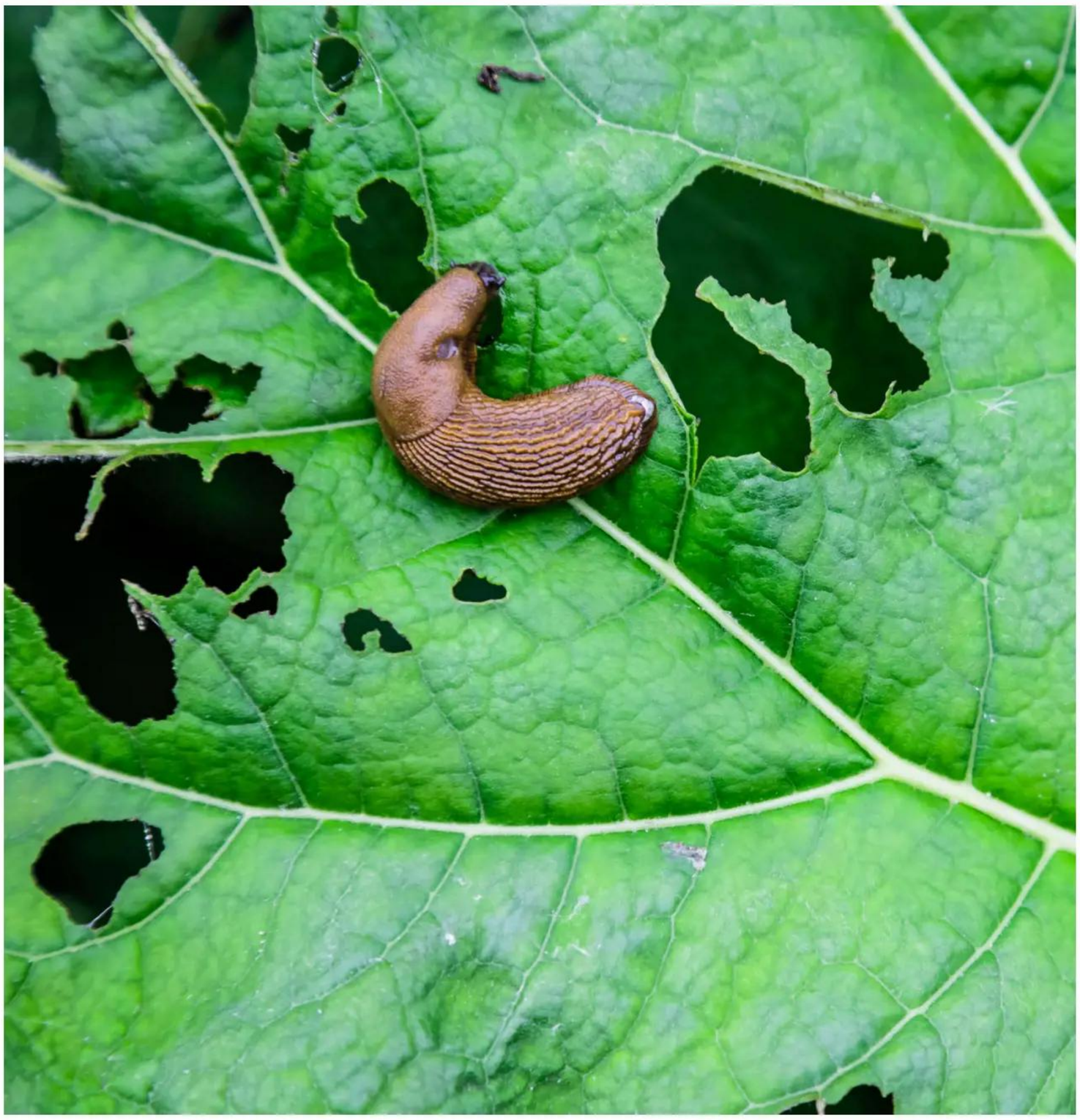
Don't let the unwanted attention of pests ruin your pot paradise – learn how to identify and limit the impact of common plant predators

Us gardeners don't have it easy – we are locked in a constant fight with a barrage of pests that always seem to target the plants we love the most. It can't possibly be personal, but it sure feels like it is sometimes.

Pests can be anything from tiny insects that weaken plants by sucking their sap, to cats having a merry time digging up your favourite flowers. And it doesn't matter if you are working with a pure container garden, or just a few pots here and there – the plants are as susceptible as if you were gardening in a traditional dug bed.

The damage caused by pests can vary wildly. Some, like ants, will only cause real problems if there is a significant infestation, while others, like box tree caterpillars, are capable of completely destroying a plant. Birds can gobble up crops or seeds, while foxes and cats can scorch plants with their urine.

But however frustrated you get with pests, you need to try and take a realistic, relaxed and balanced attitude. The days of reaching for a toxic pesticide to deal with unwanted visitors are long gone, and rightly so. It turns out that all of those pests we moan about are incredibly important to all the wildlife we want to protect, such as bees. There is nothing wrong with aiming for pest management – and we give you advice for tackling many common fiends here – but most of the time, if your plants are healthy and you encourage a range of wildlife to your garden, pests won't cause you headaches.



1. Slugs and snails

These slimy customers are probably at the top of every gardener's hit list. Both are easy to recognise and usually pretty easy to remove thanks to their size, although some slugs can be smaller to wrangle (while others, like the black slug, can be huge). They love tender new growth, and will happily chomp through leaves.

Sign & symptoms

If you spy holes on your plant leaves, or just have a collection of nibbled stalks left, chances are slugs or snails are to blame. Look for trails of their iridescent slime.

Likes

Hostas, delphiniums, dahlias, lupins, sweet peas

Dislikes

Ferns, hydrangeas, lavender

How to control

Put a barrier, such as mesh, under your pots to prevent entry. Go out at night and physically remove them – disposing in a way you feel comfortable with. Water in the morning, so the soil is dry by the time they emerge. Surround pots with copper or rough material – they hate the feel of it.

2. Vine weevils

Vine weevils are a common pest and are especially fond of container-grown plants. It's actually the larvae that do the most damage, as they eat the roots. These are cream-coloured grubs with brown heads, up to 1cm long and shaped like a 'C'. The adult beetles are a dull black and roughly 9mm long. These target leaves.

Sign & symptoms

Look for trails of irregular notches along the edges of leaves, which will show the presence of adult beetles. If any grubs are attacking roots, the plant will wilt.

Likes

Rhododendrons, camelias, primulas, strawberries, heucheras

Dislikes

Mint, lavender, geranium

How to control

When on slug or snail watch at night, keep an eye out for the adult vine weevil, too. When spotted, just lift off and dispose of them. If you don't fancy digging through a plant's roots to pick out the larvae, you can buy nematodes specifically for them. Mix with water and pour into the soil.



3. *Aphids*

These tiny winged bugs may be hard to spot on their own (they range from 1-7mm in size) but they can usually be found in clusters on tender new growth of plants, where they suck the sap. Aphids (also known as greenfly or blackfly) come in several colours: green, black, yellow and orange.

Sign & symptoms

Large infestations can cause disfigured growth, make the plant weak and possibly cause very young plants to die. Sometimes the sticky substance aphids exude can cause a black mould, preventing photosynthesis.

Likes

Zinnia, cosmos, nasturtium, sunflower, roses

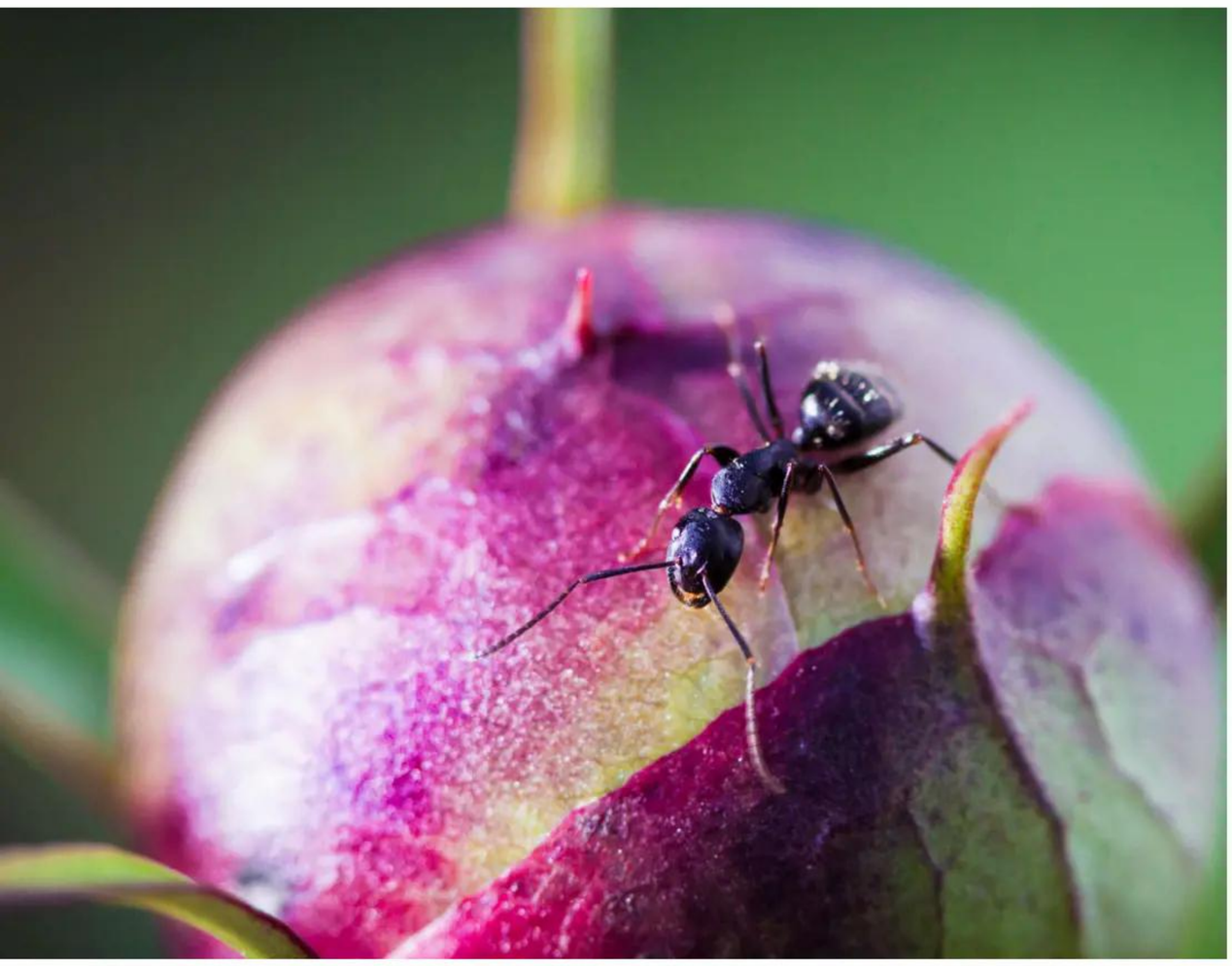
Dislikes

Garlic, marigolds, rosemary

How to control

Aphids are food for a lot of wildlife, so keep this in mind when dealing with them. The easiest method is shooting a jet of water from a hose, knocking them off. You could also plant a 'trap' pot of strong plants who can withstand their attention, diverting them from more delicate specimens. Nematodes are a good solution for large gatherings.





4. *Ants*

The sight of these six-legged, round-headed and pointy-ended insects scurrying about is familiar during the summer. The black garden ant is the most common, which is dark brown or black and 3-5mm in length. Ants can disturb plant roots with all their burrowing, and because they love the sweet substance exuded by aphids, they can protect them from predators.

Sign & symptoms

If you have ants in, or near your pots, you will see them. Another sign is small mounds of earth, a result of their nest. If you have a higher-than usual amount of aphids, ants may be 'farming' them.

Likes

Peonies, clematis, roses, penstemon

Dislikes

Basil, mint, marigold

How to control

If ants are in your pots, glove up and remove the plant from the pot over some tarp. The ants will go nuts, but you need to destroy the queen and eggs. Nematodes can deter them, although you could also try tackling any aphids you have, cutting off their food source.

5. *Lily beetles*

This bright red beetle is easy to spot but can be an absolute devil to control. The adult beetles are 6-8mm long, and lay eggs between April and September. The red-brown grubs cover themselves in a slick black excrement. Both adults and grubs feed on plants in the lily family.

Sign & symptoms

If you don't notice the bright red beetle on your lily, the fact that the leaves, flowers, buds or seedpods have been gnawed to oblivion is a sure sign this unwelcome visitor is around.

Likes

Lilies, Solomon's seal, fritillaries

Dislikes

They are only interested in plants from the lily family, but they seem to dislike garlic, so lilies grown next to garlic may be less prone to beetle attacks.

How to control

Check regularly, pick off any grubs or adults you see and squash them. The adults fall off the plant easily so lay something underneath to catch them. A spray of sunflower oil on the larvae can also help.

6. Rosemary beetles

These insanely beautiful, purple-striped, green, shiny, rounded beetles are roughly 8mm long. The adults lay elongated eggs underneath the leaves of rosemary from September until winter, if the weather stays warm. Larvae, which are light grey with dark stripes, will appear after a couple of weeks. Both adults and larvae feed on the leaves.

Sign & symptoms
Noticed that your rosemary, lavender, sage or thyme now have holes in their leaves? It's probably due to the presence of this shiny scallywag.

Likes
Rosemary, lavender, sage, Russian sage, thyme

Dislikes
Unfortunately there are no known plants to repel the rosemary beetle but it doesn't wander from its core group of chosen plants.

How to control
As with most of the pests here, the best deterrent is to physically remove the beetle or the larvae from the plant and dispose of them. The easiest way of doing this is to place something under the plant and shake it. However, if a plant is healthy, the beetles actually do little damage.



7. Box tree caterpillars

These blighters are the larvae of a moth and are capable of major damage. They reach about 4cm in length, and have a thin white stripe down the middle of their back, flanked by two black stripes, with bright yellow-green sides. They get deep within the plant and eat the leaves – a bad infestation can destroy a plant.

Sign & symptoms
The caterpillars create a webbing around the box leaves and there might also be some dieback. It can be confused with box blight, but the webbing and caterpillar droppings confirm it is the caterpillar.

Likes
Specific to the box plants (*Buxus*)

Dislikes
Japanese holly, yew, germander

How to control
Small infestations can be removed by hand, but you will need to do this every day and delve deep into the plant to ensure you get them all. You can also cut out any affected areas. Make sure you kill the caterpillars and burn any foliage you cut. There are also nematodes to help deal with the problem.





8. *Cabbage white caterpillars*

Small and large white butterflies are responsible for these caterpillars, with the small ones being about 2.5cm long and a pale green colour. The large ones are 4cm and have black markings on a yellow body. As to be expected with a caterpillar, the plant's leaves are their food source.

Sign & symptoms

You'll know if you have this caterpillar because holes will appear both on the inner and outer leaves of your brassicas. You can also see the caterpillars, which is a bit of a giveaway!

Likes

Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, nasturtium

Dislikes

Rosemary, dill, sage

How to control

When getting your pots ready to grow your brassicas, insert some canes so you can cover your crop with horticultural fleece or a fine netting. This will prevent the butterflies from entering and laying eggs. If some do manage to get through, remove the caterpillars by hand.

9. *Scale insects*

These are tiny insects, 1-6mm in size, that suck the sap from plants. There are many different species of scale insect, with adults usually having a waxy shell covering them. They can easily be mistaken for a small mark under the leaf of a plant, or look like a growth on the stem or leaf joint.

Sign & symptoms

Along with the actual insect, you might also notice a black sooty mould, caused by the sweet sap they release. In large numbers, they can weaken a plant or cause the leaves to go yellow.

Likes

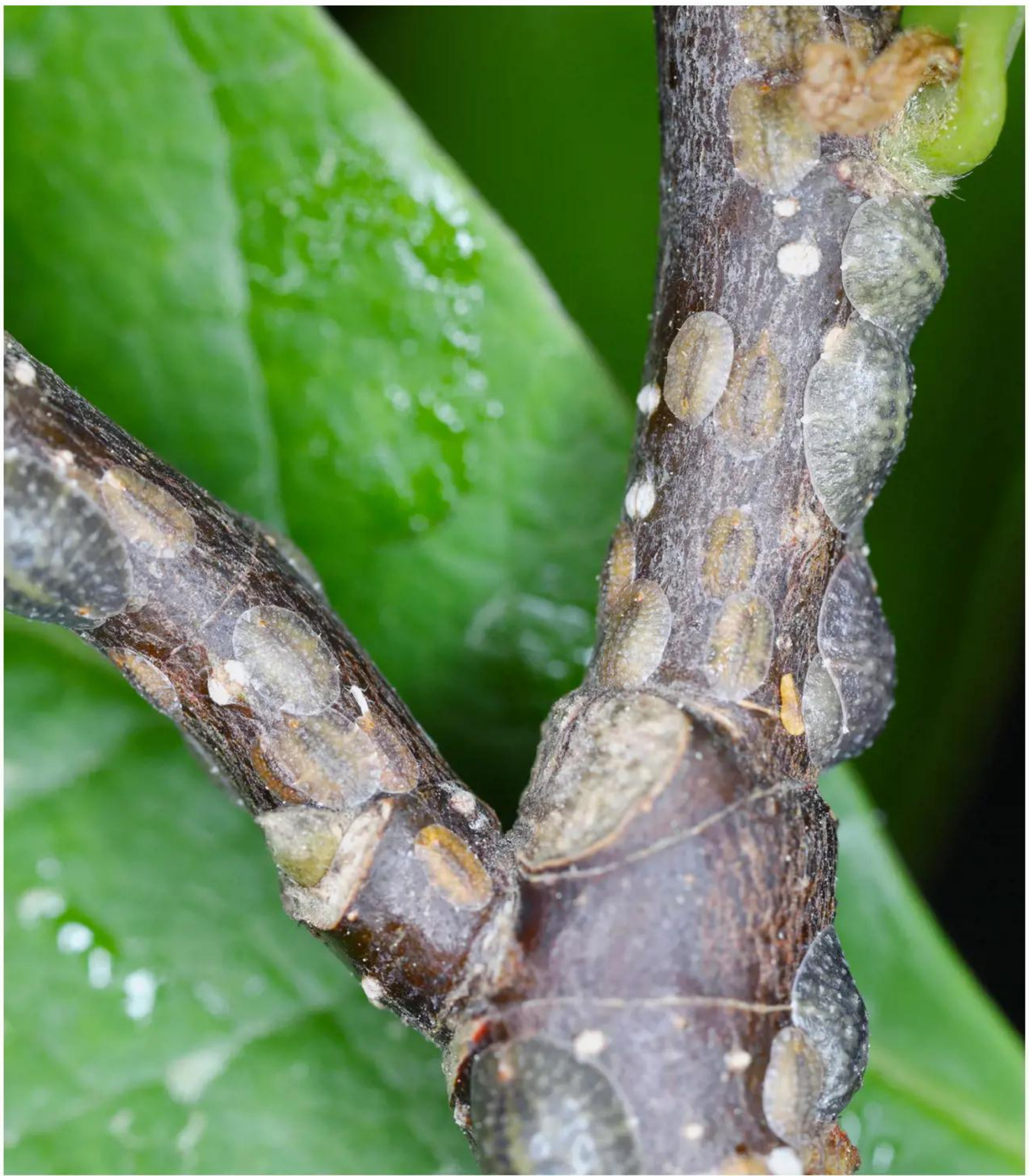
Rhododendron, camelias, holly, star jasmine

Dislikes

Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be a specific plant that repels scale insects.

How to control

If you notice scale insects on a plant, move it away from other susceptible plants to avoid them spreading. If a lot of the plant is affected, cut off the leaves and stems and burn. Small infestations can be picked or rubbed off by hand, or use a cotton bud dipped in rubbing alcohol to remove them.



10. Whiteflies

Pots in the greenhouse can be susceptible to whitefly. These tiny flies are about 1.5mm and set their sights on sucking out the sap of vegetables or ornamental plants. They live on the underside of leaves, as do the cream-coloured, flat nymphs (the larvae or pupae).

Sign & symptoms

You will know if you have whitefly, as if you knock a plant, they will fly up. An infestation of many flies will weaken a plant. They also excrete honeydew, which falls on lower leaves and can produce a black mould.

Likes

Fuschias, tomatoes, cucumbers

Dislikes

French marigold, catmint, basil

How to control

Whitefly is usually introduced to an area, so quarantine new plants to see if any develop before placing in your greenhouse. Ventilation can help reduce the sooty mould, while a parasitic wasp can kill the nymphs. They must be introduced before a large infestation is allowed to take hold.





11. Cockchafers

Also called 'May bugs', they can often be seen buzzing around and slamming into windows on May evenings. Adults are about 3cm long, with brown wing cases and hairy white undersides. The larvae can be found in the soil and are large and plump, with cream-coloured bodies and light brown heads. Both eat plants.

Sign & symptoms

Adults will nibble on flowers and leaves, while the larvae eat plant roots. The adults don't really do much harm, but the larvae can cause stunted growth or leaf wilt.

Likes

Daisies, dandelions, vegetables

Dislikes

Marigolds, garlic, mint

How to control

You may not want to bother dealing with the adults, as they don't cause much harm, but the larvae are worth removing if your plants look weak. Removal is easiest by hand – just be careful of plant roots. Birds, especially corvids, love them, so you can use them as feed. There is also a nematode that can be watered into the soil.

12. Mealy bugs

Looking similar to scale insects, mealybugs limit their sap-sucking attacks to greenhouse plants or houseplants. Their 4mm-long bodies are covered in a white secretion and they hang out in awkward places on a plant, such as leaf axils. The honeydew they exude can attract sooty mould.

Sign & symptoms

As with other sap-sucking plants, a large group of mealybugs will result in a weakened plant. The sticky honeydew they produce also inhibits plant and fruit growth.

Likes

Hibiscus, citrus trees, orchids

Dislikes

Lavender, thyme, onion

How to control

If the infestation is small enough, you can pick the mealybugs off by hand. Alternatively, use a cotton bud dipped in some rubbing alcohol to wipe them off. A spray of neem oil can also help, as can quarantining new plants to ensure there is no infestation before you put them in your greenhouse.



13. Leafhoppers

Leafhoppers belong to the Cicadellidae family. They are just a few millimetres in length, and can be brown, yellow or green. They are most noticeable when leaping from plants, where they suck the sap of leaves, although they can also fly.

Sign & symptoms

Leafhoppers can cause mottling or discolouration on the leaves. Specific species can cause greater damage – the Rhododendron leafhopper, for example, can spread a fungal disease that stops the plant from flowering.

Likes

Rhododendrons, rose, fuschia, sage

Dislikes

Dill, fennel

How to control

You can apply a treatment of diatomaceous earth to the top and bottom of affected leaves, or a spritz of horticultural soap can work. They do little damage to healthy plants, so if you can tolerate them, keep feeding and watering your plants so they stay strong. Encourage natural predators, like ladybirds, wasps and birds.





14. Leaf miner

There are different kinds and species of leaf miners. The term ‘leaf miner’ is a reference to the larvae that burrow their way under a leaf’s surface. Species of sawflies, beetles and moths all have larvae that do this. The damage can cause leaves to drop.

Sign & symptoms

Leaf miner larvae leave wiggly, pale trails over a leaf. If the infestation is large, it can prevent photosynthesis. If you notice the marks, pull a leaf apart and you should be able to see the larvae (about 2mm long and flat).

Likes

Tomatoes, spinach, ornamental trees

Dislikes

Rosemary, dill, garlic

How to control

As ever, healthy plants are more resistant to pest attacks, naturally taking care of the problem. Introducing predators, such as lacewings, nematodes or parasitoid wasps can help, as can pinching the area where a mining trail ends, hopefully killing the larvae. Try removing affected leaves as well.

15. Earwigs

These small brown insects, measuring roughly 1.5cm in length, are most easily identified by the big pincers on their back end. They are something of a double-edged sword in the garden. On the one hand they will take care of aphids on fruit trees, on the other hand, they do eat plants.

Sign & symptoms

Earwig damage can be mistaken for slug or snail damage, as their feasting results in holes and ragged edges appearing in petals and leaves.

Likes

Dahlias, roses, zinnias, lettuce

Dislikes

Fennel, pot marigold, bay

How to control

It’s easy to trap earwigs – they love dark, sheltered places, so an upturned pot stuffed with straw, resting on a cane will prove irresistible. Tip it out every day and dispose of the earwigs. Clear up any dark, moist areas around your garden or sprinkle some diatomaceous earth around susceptible plants.



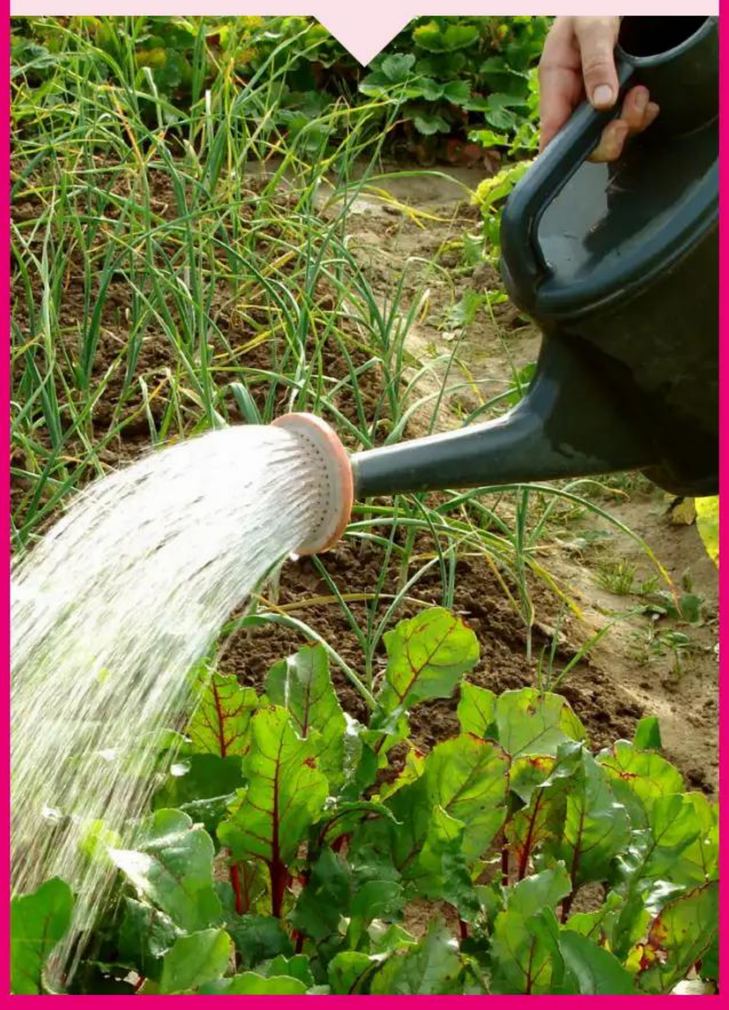
Dealing with pests

Discover easy, effective and organic methods for taming an unruly pest population

Nematodes

When it comes to stubborn or particularly problematic plant pests, nematodes are a fantastic solution. These microscopic creatures are essentially parasites for certain species, releasing bacteria into the target pest, thereby killing it. Because they only target the pest, other wildlife is safe.

They are usually watered in, but do check the packet for specific instructions, such as when to apply and if the soil has to be above a certain temperature. You can easily buy them online.





Encourage predators

A healthy garden is all about balance, and if you can create a natural habitat for wildlife, you'll find they will handle pretty much all of the pest control. Birds will snack on grubs or aphids, hedgehogs will hoover up slugs, while ladybirds will tackle scale insects. Buy a book or do some online research to discover the best plants for encouraging natural predators.

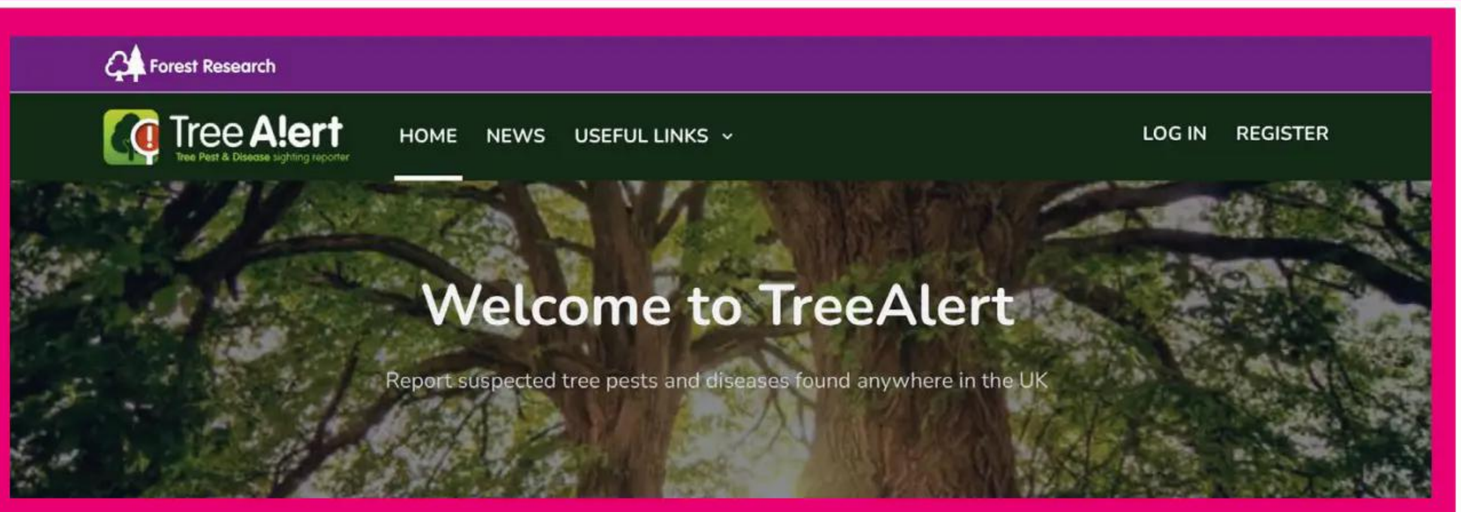
Picking off by hand

Surely the most straightforward pest control method – and in many cases the most effective. You see a pest, you pick it off the plant. Job done. Wear gloves when doing this, just in case the pest inspires some kind of reaction to your skin. How you dispose of the pest then becomes your choice – we'd suggest moving it far, far away.



Notifiable pests

What to do if you spot an usual pest on your plants



The RHS reports that the number of pests and diseases from abroad have increased in recent years. This is mainly because of an increased diversity of plant products being imported from a greater number of sources. Also, because of climate change, pests that previously would have died out naturally might now find a suitable home.

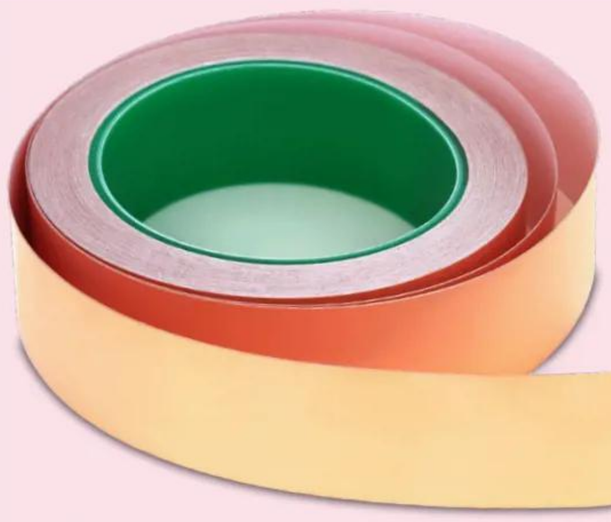
Notifiable pests are ones that are not native to a country, which could pose a threat to crops, plants and wildlife. It is essential that anything thought to be a notifiable pest is reported, so the relevant action can be taken.

The best place to start is DEFRA (planthealthportal.defra.gov.uk/pests-and-diseases/pest-and-disease-factsheets/notifiable-pests). This page has reports on problem pests, with photos, descriptions of the damage caused and contact details if you need to report a sighting.

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) is another organisation to report any sightings (planthealth.info@apha.gov.uk) and if you have seen something weird on a tree, visit TreeAlert (treealert.forestresearch.gov.uk).

Companion planting

Some plants make good buddies for each other, especially when it comes to pest control. As you will have seen in our roundup of pests, for every plant that a pest loves, there are usually some that they hate. So by placing a 'hated' plant next to a susceptible plant, you can hopefully discourage the pest. It is also useful to plant species that attract natural predators of the pest you want to avoid.



Create barriers

Some pests can be deterred by using a physical barrier to block them. For example, use fleece or netting over plants to prevent the cabbage white butterfly from laying eggs. Slugs and snails do not like sharp objects, so crushed eggshells around the base of plants can help keep them away, as can copper piping or tape applied around the top of pots.

Spraying aphids

Aphids are a right pain – the excitement of a flush of new growth on precious plants like roses can be dampened if you notice the buds are smothered by the blighters. You can make your own aphid spray: simply mix some horticultural soap (sometimes called insecticidal soap) with water, according to the product's instructions, and then spray on the aphids. It's best to do this at night so you don't risk scorching the plant in the sun.









How to handle larger wildlife

Sometimes a pest problem isn't something you can just pick off…

We've focused on pests of the creepy crawly variety, but plant pests can be much larger than tiny bugs. Here we examine some of the other common garden critters your plants might come up against, with advice on how to smooth relations over. Don't worry – all of the solutions discussed below are humane.

Protect plants from birds

Although birds can be great friends to a gardener, they can also become a pest themselves, especially where edibles are concerned. So rather than watch your tender fruit and veg get gobbled, employ some deterrents.

Netting is the most effective way of saving produce. Ensure the holes in the netting are smaller than 1cm, and pull it taunt over the container. You don't want birds getting tangled in it. Fleece can also be used, as can inserting lots of small sticks around your plants to hide them.

Scare tactics can save plants from hungry beaks, but keep any of these methods to one part of the garden so you don't scare all the birds. Sudden movement and light give birds the heebie-jeebies, so hang some CDs from a couple of canes stuck in your crop pot. Garden spinners can also help. Toy snakes at the base of a plant can be effective, but move them regularly otherwise the birds will soon learn they aren't real.

Discourage rodents

Whatever your view of rodents, not many of us want to share our garden with them. But unless numbers are out of hand, extermination isn't the only solution.

Rats and mice like all of the dark, undisturbed corners of your garden, so the first step to deterring an infestation is to tidy up these areas, and block any holes you see on structures. Mint is thought to deter rodents, so plant up some pots and place where you think there might be a problem. Dried mint leaves or cotton balls soaked in peppermint oil can also work, but need replacing regularly. Herbs with a strong smell can put rats and mice off an area – use thyme, basil or garlic as a protective border. If you don't mind spending some cash, solar-powered repellers send out ultrasonic frequencies targeting rodents, either making them leave or keeping them away.

Squirrels can be destructive blighters, either by eating plants or disturbing them when burying acorns. The ultrasonic repellers for rodents should also work on squirrels, but always check reviews to ensure a product does actually work. Using taut bird netting to physically enclose pots will also scupper their plans. Squirrels aren't fond of the smell of pepper, apple cider vinegar or peppermint, so try mixing some up with water to make a DIY repellent to spray near your crops.

Tackle the cute critters

Larger mammals, such as cats, rabbits and foxes might be considered more visually appealing than rodents, but they can cause just as much damage. Cats can be massive pains – even if it's your own cat – as they have zero concern for anything. So your prized pot of tender seedlings might be their next snoozing platform, or a surface that needs to be dug for them to relieve themselves. Using prickly plants next to ones you want to protect might help avoid any visits, and covering the top of your pots with stones could help deter any digging. Cats aren't keen on citrus smells, coffee, cayenne pepper, peppermint or mustard oil. Use this to your advantage by placing these near pots or soaking cotton wool in the oils.

Foxes are lovely to see, but if they are causing havoc in your garden, there are a few tricks to try. First, ensure your rubbish and food waste are securely stored, so you aren't tempting them with food. They apparently hate the smell of chilli pepper and garlic, so placing these around the garden could make them think twice about visiting. Another option is to startle them with motion-sensing lights or sprinklers, but this may deter other nocturnal wildlife.

Rabbits are incredibly cute, but also incredibly destructive when it comes to chomping on your plants. While leafy veg sends them into a delirious frenzy, onions turn them right off, so plant them around your garden. A dome made out of chicken wire that's firmly secured into pots is the best way to prevent damage. Rabbits like to stay near their home, so ensure your garden doesn't become their abode by clearing away dead leaves and checking for any holes under buildings. You could also try mixing equal volumes of citrus juice and water to spray on your plants to help deter them.

WORDS JO COLE **PHOTOGRAPHS** ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES

The secret to DAZZLING DISPLAYS

Employ the theory of thriller, filler and spiller to achieve stunning results whatever container, season or aspect you are working in

There is a whole world of beautiful pot displays awaiting you, and all you need to unlock this place of wonder are three little words: thriller, filler and spiller.

This simple theory bases a pot arrangement around three types of plants; a thriller plant, which is something tall and dramatic, placed in the middle or back of the pot; filler plants to give volume and surround the thriller plant; and spiller plants at the front of the pot to soften the edges. Simply pick your plants, use one of two arrangements (see 'How to arrange a pot') and boom! You are the proud owner of a professional-looking container.

When adopting this theory, most people use annuals or just want the pot for one season, which means you don't have to worry about ensuring the container is big enough for future growth, or that the plants require the same conditions. But if you want a permanent display, ensure the plants you use need the same amount of sunlight and water, and suit the same soil type.

Pick whatever container you like, and have fun with the plants you choose. Maybe mix textures for visual interest, plump for all edibles or only use wildlife-friendly plants. The thriller element doesn't have to be a plant, either – it could be a sculpture or an arrangement of twigs that you hang fairy lights from.

To help get you started, we've suggested some recipes for each season, along with arrangement ideas and tips for specific conditions. Follow this advice and you'll soon be surrounded by the best-looking pots you've ever made.

Seasonal arrangements

Thrill, spill and fill your pots, whatever the season!

SPRING



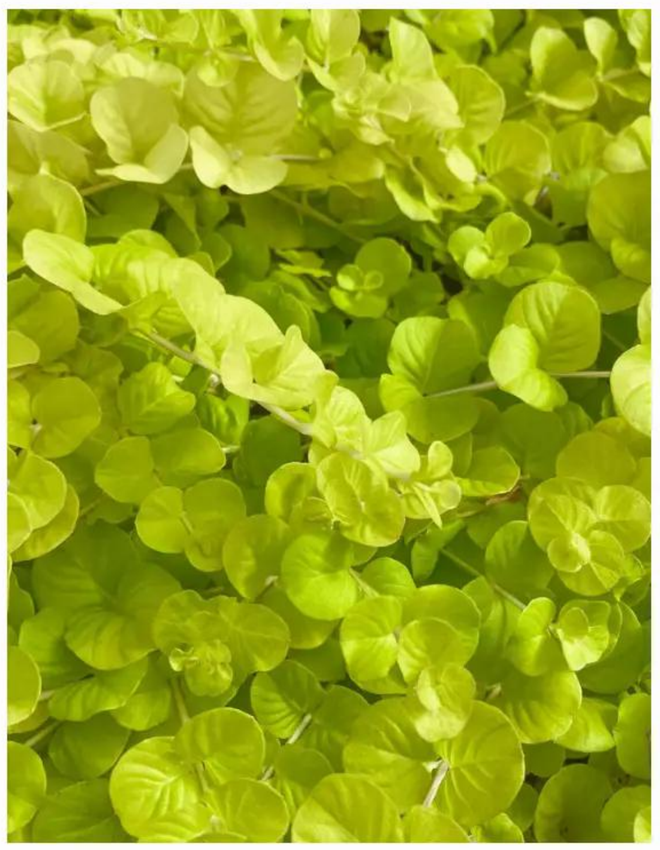
Tulipa 'Golden Apeldoorn'

What better way to come out of winter and welcome the spring than being greeted by a big, sunny yellow tulip? Flowering from April and with a height of roughly 55cm, this variety picks out the yellow tinges found in the filler and spiller of this arrangement.



Erysimum cheiri 'Fire King'

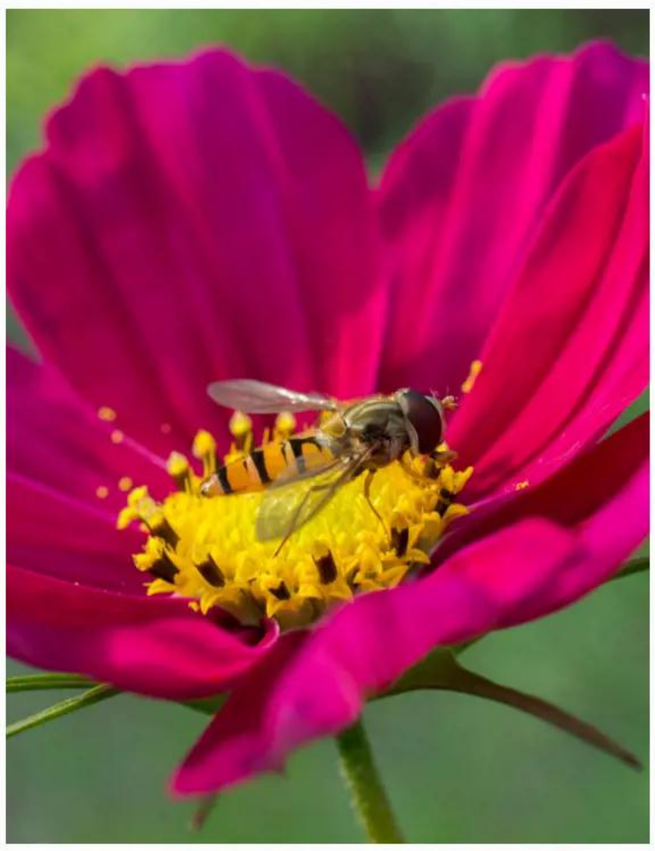
Wallflowers are fantastic spring plants for providing a shot of colour after a grey winter, and this fiery fellow is particularly welcome. It not only provides much needed food for pollinators, but it can flower from February right through to July. It reaches a height and spread of around 30cm.



Lysimachia 'Goldilocks'

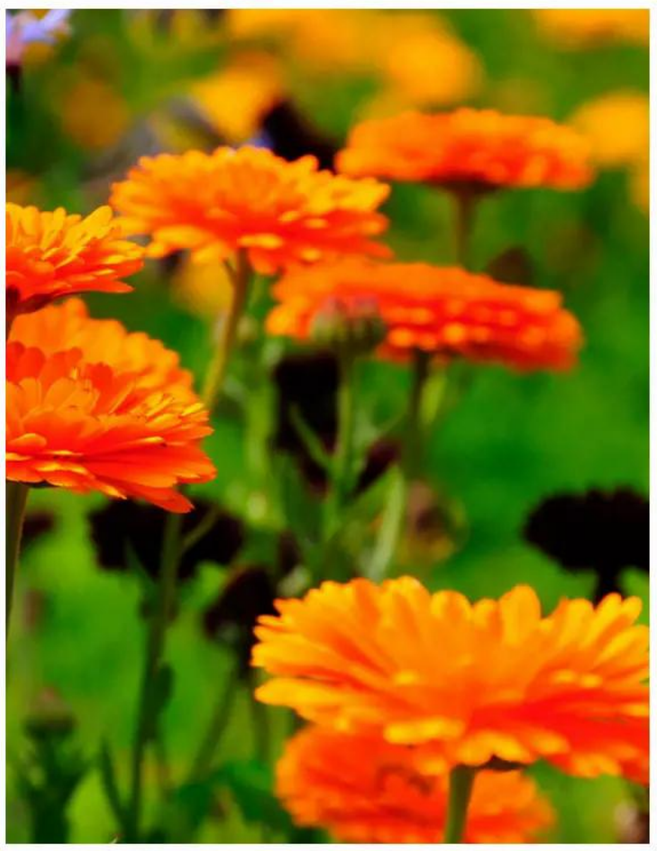
The wonderfully named 'Creeping Jenny' is prized for its ground cover or trailing abilities. Reaching just 10cm in height, the golden hues of this evergreen perfectly complement the other inhabitants of the pot, while the zingy green in the leaves sparks off the fire colours of the wallflower.

SUMMER



Cosmos bipinnatus 'Dazzler'

The intense deep pink of this cosmos doesn't get washed out by the strong summer sun, but instead takes in the light and appears to glow from within. Reaching about 1m tall, the open flowers are heaven for pollinators and the frothy green foliage is a lovely feature by itself.



Calendula officinalis 'Indian Prince' (Prince Series)

Like the cosmos, this marigold keeps on flowering, meaning both will provide you with cut flowers all summer. Pollinators also adore this plant, which reaches roughly 60cm. The deep, burnt orange contrasts beautifully with the cosmos.



Lobelia erinus 'Crystal Palace'

This trailing lobelia will fill out the bottom area of the container, with the deep, violet blue flowers shining out. It more than holds its own against the strength of the other two colours, resulting in a summer pot that will lift your spirits and get you in the holiday mood.

Seasonal arrangements

AUTUMN



Dahlia 'Bishop of Llandaff'
The intensity of the red semi-double flowers on this dahlia is unbelievable, especially with the contrasting deep bronzy/burgundy leaves. Reaching about 1m tall, it is a fantastic plant for pollinators, with lovely long stems for cut flowers, and it looks great in the low autumn sun.



Rudbeckia fulgida var. sullivantii 'Goldsturm'
The coneflower is an autumn border favourite for good reason. The rich yellow gives a golden glow in the low sun, while its spiky flowers contrast with the roundness of the dahlia. It's another provider for pollinators, too, and reaches about 60cm.

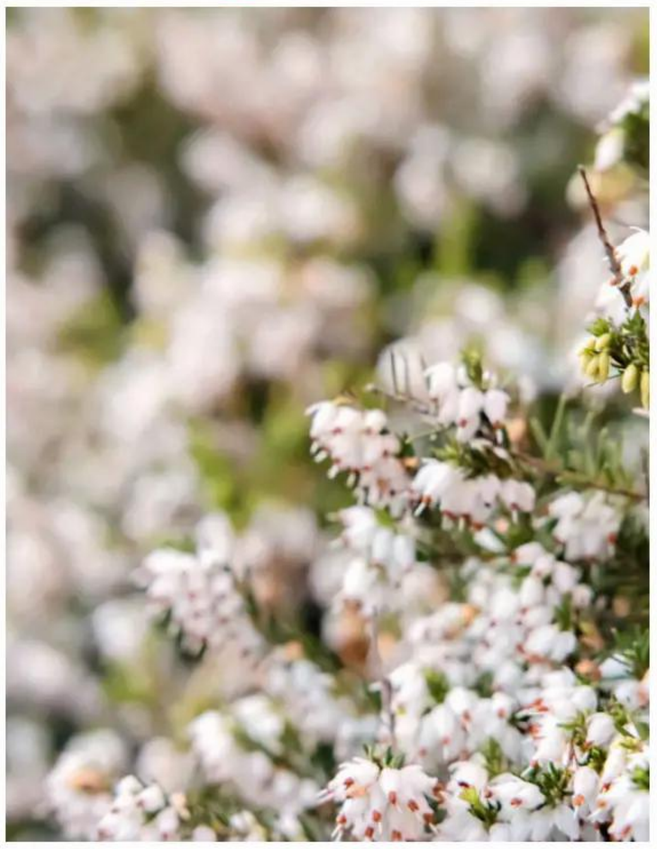


Heuchera 'Forever Purple'
Although heucheras aren't strictly known as trailing plants, the leaves will spill over, softening the pot edges nicely. The intense, deep purple leaves of this variety ties the autumnal colour scheme of the container together, both contrasting and enhancing the other two species.

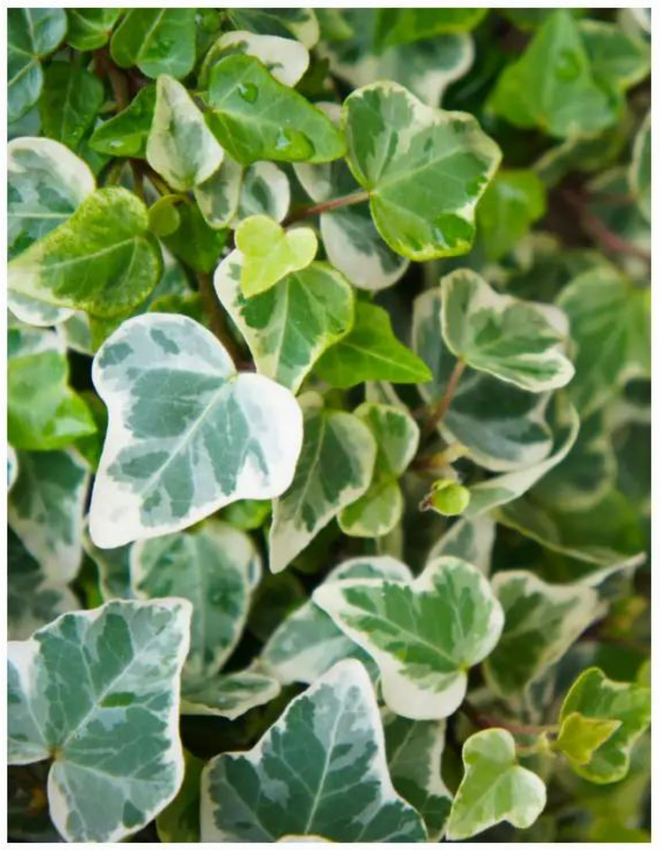
WINTER



Taxus baccata
The English Yew can grow to be an absolute monster, but with regular clipping, you can create cones to have as a permanent thriller in a pot. The dark green leaves are what you would expect from a winter plant, and if you let a female plant grow a bit, you will also get red fruits.



Erica carnea f. alba 'Whitehall'
This compact winter heath heather may only reach 30cm, but it produces an abundance of urn-shaped flowers against contrasting green foliage from January to March. It brightens up a dark winter day, and offers valuable food for pollinators at a time when there is little else about.



Hedera helix 'Glacier'
Finishing off the winter pot is an ivy that picks up on elements of both of the other plants. The grey-green leaves of the 'Glacier' cultivar provide interesting contrast to the deep green of the yew, while the creamy markings echo the white of the heather.

How to arrange a pot

Viewed from one side

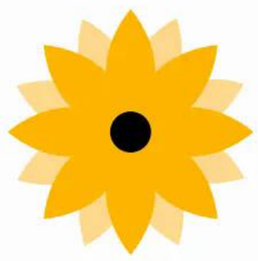
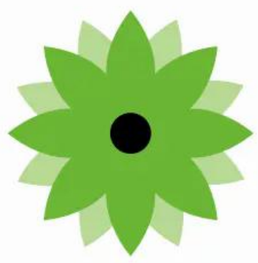
For pots that will be viewed from one angle, place the thriller at the back of the pot. Then plant the fillers in front of the thriller. They don't need to surround it completely, so it is a good arrangement for not using as many plants. Finally, add the spillers to the front of the pot. This arrangement is great against a wall.



Viewed from all sides

Use this arrangement to ensure your pot looks good from all angles. Place the thriller plant in the middle, then arrange the fillers and the spillers around the thriller, alternating each time. Ensure they form an enclosed circle around the thriller – you don't want any gaps. This will give you a more casual, rustic style.



	SUN	SHADE
 **THRILLER**	*Fritillaria imperialis* 'Lutea' Tulips Daffodils *Forsythia* × *intermedia* *Verbena bonariensis* *Canna* × *generalis* Cannova Bronze Scarlet *Trachelospermum jasminoides* *Clematis florida* var. florida 'Sieboldiana' Standard tree rose 'Boscobel' *Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Sensation Picotee' *Phormium* 'Maori Queen' *Lonicera periclymenum* 'Strawberries and Cream' *Anemanthele lessoniana* *Anchusa azurea* 'Dropmore' *Lobelia* × *speciosa* 'Hadspen Purple' (PBR) *Achillea filipendulina* 'Cloth of Gold' *Delphinium* 'Galahad' (Pacific Hybrid Series) *Salvia* 'Amante' *Agapanthus* 'Midnight Star' *Papaver* (Oriental Group)	*Skimmia japonica* 'Perosa' (PBR) *Campanula glomerata* 'Superba' *Polygonatum* × *hybridum* *Dryopteris affinis* 'Cristata' *Campanula persicifolia* var. Alba *Astilbe* 'Bressingham Beauty' (× arendsii) *Symphyotrichum novi-belgii* 'Crimson Brocade' *Digitalis purpurea* 'Sutton's Apricot' *Anemone* × *hybrida* *Tellima grandiflora* *Thalictrum delavayi* *Digitalis* × *mertonensis* *Astrantia major* 'Claret' *Sarcococca confusa* *Lonicera* × *purpusii* 'Winter Beauty' *Polemonium caeruleum* *Hosta* 'Regal Splendor' *Penstemon* 'Andenken an Friedrich Hahn' *Rhododendron luteum* *Rhododendron* 'Pink Spider' (PBR)
 **FILLER**	*Erysimum* 'Spring Breeze Sunset' *Narcissus* 'Tête-à-tête' *Hyacinthusorientalis* 'Delft Blue' *Muscari armeniacum* *Lavandula stoechas* subsp. *stoechas* Lilac Wings ('Prolil') (PBR) *Calendula officinalis* 'Indian Prince' *Calluna vulgaris* 'Melanie' *Myosotis sylvatica* *Echinacea* 'Parrot' *Brachyscome* 'Strawberry Pink *Osteospermum* 'Tresco Purple' *Pelargonium* 'Concolor Lace' *Coreopsis verticillata* 'Moonbeam' *Panicum capillare* 'Sparkling Fountain' *Imperata cylindrica* 'Rubra' *Nigella papillosa* *Centaurea cyanus* *Tagetes patula* 'Burning Embers' *Papaver nudicaule* *Alchemilla mollis*	*Hosta* 'Fire and Ice' *Geum* Petticoats Peach ('Tuneup') (Petticoats Series) (PBR) *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Looking Glass' (PBR) *Gaultheria procumbens* Big Berry ('Gaubi') (PBR) *Helleborus* × *hybridus* Harvington lime *Heuchera* 'Autumn Leaves' (PBR) *Primula vulgaris* *Bergenia* 'Abendglut' *Polystichum polyblepharum* *Liriope muscari* *Tiarella* 'Spring Symphony' *Polypodium vulgare* *Pulmonaria saccharata* *Astrantia* *Primula vialii* *Salvia nemorosa* 'Sensation Series' *Dipsacus fullonum* *Hesperis matronalis* *Euphorbia graminea* *Cuphea* 'Torpedo'
SPILLER	*Geranium* Sabani Blue ('Bremigo') (PBR) *Festuca glauca* Intense Blue ('Casblue') (PBR) *Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea' *Calibrachoa* Chameleon double pink yellow *Tropaeolum minus* *Sedum* 'Wildfire' *Lobularia maritima* Snowdrift' *Chaenostoma* 'Megacopa Blue' *Fuchsia* Mariska ('Bf01') (PBR) (Bella Series) *Glandularia* – Vervain Tomatoes 'Red Profusion' *Nemesia* Nesia Burgundy *Erigeron karvinskianus* *Tagetes tenuifolia* 'Golden Gem' *Aubrieta* 'Purple Cascade' (Cascade Series) F1 *Silene uniflora* *Limnanthes douglasii* *Origanum* 'Kent Beauty' *Geranium* × *oxonianum* 'Rose Clair' *Polemonium reptans* 'Stairway to Heaven'	*Cyclamen coum* subsp. *coum f. pallidum* 'Album' *Muscari comosum* 'Plumosum' *Hedera colchica* *Ajuga reptans* 'Atropurpurea' *Vinca minor* *Carex oshimensis* Evergold' *Muehlenbeckia* *Begonia* × *intermedia* 'Bertinii' *Begonia* (Pendula Group) 'White Giant' *Plectranthus coleoides* *Hakonechloa macra* 'Nicolas' *Heartsease* *Phlox divaricata* *Omphalodes cappadocica* *Lindernia grandiflora* *Coleus scutellarioides* 'Campfire' *Coleus* 'Flamethrower Sriracha' *Calibrachoa* Can-can Black Cherry (Can-can Series) *Geranium* 'Mavis Simpson' *Petunia* Surfinia Deep Red ('Sunsurf Akatora') (PBR) (Surfinia Series)

WORDS JO COLE **PHOTOGRAPHS** GETTY, JONATHAN BUCKLEY

Plan ahead FOR SPRING

Fill pots with colour to brighten up your spring garden

Try upcycling for a vintage look

Spring is the time for a makeover project. This wooden wheelbarrow has been transformed using wood paint with a tough waterproof finish that resists cracking and flaking. Aim for a nostalgic look with a mix of pansies and primula tumbling over the edge, while the centre is filled with a dwarf pink azalea and *Senecio cineraria* 'Silver Dust' to add shape. A plummy-pink hydrangea and spiky blue salvia add height. **Wheelbarrow painted with Sandtex 10 Year exterior satin in Bay Tree**

Essential tips for SPRING CONTAINERS

PACK POTS generously as plants grow more slowly at the start of the year and you want to create a lush look. 'Typically bulbs such as hyacinths and daffodils need to be planted in the autumn but don't worry if you missed the autumn window. Ready flowered bulbs are available to buy now, so you can plant these or mix them with other plants to create a beautiful spring container,' says Miracle-Gro's gardening guru Kate Turner. 'Alongside flowering bulbs, mix in flowers such as violas, pansies and bellis daisies to add colour and vibrancy to your container. Foliage plants such as trailing ivies help fill the pot and add another dimension to the aesthetic.'

FILL THE CONTAINER with good-quality peat-free compost, such as Miracle-Gro Peat Free Premium All Purpose Compost. Before filling your container, add some broken pot pieces to cover the drainage hole. Once filled with soil add larger plants first, then the smaller plants with the ivy trailing over the edge. Firm everything in and water well. After six weeks, the plants will benefit from a liquid feed.

JUST REMEMBER to regularly feed, water and deadhead plants to keep them going for as long as possible. When the bulbs have finished flowering you can then plant them in the garden to flower again next year.

Choose long-lasting colour

◀ Old favourites are getting a makeover to bring a fresh new look for spring planter ideas. The vibrant pansy variety 'Cool Wave Raspberry Swirl' produces masses of blooms and will bring a bright splash of colour to your planters and, even better, will keep going practically all year round. With a cascading habit and vigorous growth, these plants will quickly create a long-lasting display that looks good for months. All you need to do is remember to snip off any faded blooms to make sure the flowers keep coming.
Pansy 'Cool Wave Raspberry Swirl', Suttons

Pick pretty primulas

Stunning primulas come in rainbow shades of yellow, pink, orange, purple and red to add a vivid colour burst to the spring garden. Included in the family are primroses, polyanthus and auricula, so plenty to take your pick from. They come on short stems and long stems and everything in between. They start flowering in cold weather, which gives them a head start on other plants and their season is a long one. Grow them individually or mixed in with other flowers for a display that will last for months.



Go tall and elegant

The combo of a tall planter with parrot tulips makes a stylish statement for spring porches and patios. As well as looking good, tall planters are best if space is tight and are also great for layering up bulbs in 'lasagne' style planting. Group a few together for a contemporary look. Many of the latest designs use recycled rubber material which makes them a good choice for dodging frost damage and are self-watering too with built-in reservoirs.
Elho self-watering planters make light work of maintaining a spring bulb display



Make a plant theatre

Raise your collection of spring bulbs to eye level so you can better appreciate them with a stylish plant theatre. Tiered shelving is the perfect stage for a spring bulb display, and you can switch pots in and out as they fade to keep the interest going. Either choose a single variety of bulbs or mix up different types. Your plant theatre will need sturdy shelves for a range of terracotta pots or alternatively use a wooden stepladder.
Filigree iron plant theatre, H82xW77xD51cm, Sarah Raven



Go for contemporary shades

The latest pots and planters are made of textured and stippled concrete, and come in on-trend shades of grey. Pack them with plants in contrasting colours for an immediate hit. Miniature varieties of tulip are perfect if space is limited. They look punchy in a pot, especially if you choose strong colours like magenta pink fringed with a stripy detail. *Kaufmanniana* tulips, also known as water lily tulips, are another good choice for containers. They are early to flower in March or April and feature flowers like miniature water lilies on short stems which are often bi-colour.



Add a glimmer of gold

One of the first flowers of the year to bloom, the cup-shaped bright yellow petals and dainty green ruff-like collars of winter aconites are a welcome sight in February and March when colour in the garden is rare. Their native habitat is woodland but they will thrive in a container and are easy to establish and are maintenance free. They will also attract pollinating insects to the garden. They like a fertile soil that doesn't dry out and will do well in full sun or partial shade.



Include fragrant flowers

Wallflowers thrive in containers, best positioned near doors and windows to enjoy their fabulous fragrance, which bees love too. In a range of colours, they offer a long-flowering container display from March onwards and are super-easy to grow. There are perennial varieties too that return year after year with very little effort. **If you like strong shades try wallflowers in burnt orange ('Fire King' or 'Sunset Orange') and rich yellow ('Sugar Rush Yellow' or 'Sunset Yellow')**



WORDS SARAH WILSON **PHOTOGRAPHS** JONATHAN BUCKLEY/SARAH RAVEN, GETTY

Spring to life!

Perk up your patio with these amazing pots, which are packed with all of the best plants of the season

Containers spilling over with spring flowers are guaranteed to perk up the most dismal outlook. There is a surprising number of colourful plants to choose from, ranging from dainty flowering bulbs such as Lilliputian irises, crocuses, daffodils, aconites and grape hyacinths, which mingle happily among violas and primulas. Meanwhile, body and texture is injected with a mixture of evergreen heathers, grasses, skimmias, periwinkles or ivies.

Style tip

Soften the hard edges of the basket with trailing plants such as ivy, periwinkle or clematis



Gold tinted

A key to creating beautiful displays lies in arranging the plants so that the proportions are balanced. In this basket, the central plant is a small evergreen 'Emerald 'n' Gold' spindle which, from whatever side the basket is viewed, provides a vibrant green and gold backdrop to the smaller plants arranged around the perimeter, spaced the same distance apart as the even numbers on a clock face. Finally, variegated ivy and periwinkle tumble over the sides. First to flower are winter aconites, followed by clumps of 'Cream Beauty' crocuses, a widely available variety. But the star of the show is *Iris reticulata* 'Katharine Hodgkin', a delightful dwarf iris with pale-blue flowers and striking markings.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

+ 40cm woven willow hanging basket
+ 3 pots *Iris reticulata* 'Katharine Hodgkin'
+ 2 pots *Crocus chrysanthus* 'Cream Beauty'
+ 2 pots white viola
+ 1 variegated ivy
+ 1 *Euonymus fortunei* 'Emerald 'n' Gold'

Step-by-step
HOW TO POT UP



1 In the centre of the basket, plant *Euonymus fortunei* 'Emerald 'n' Gold', a spindle with golden-margined leaves.



2 Insert a leafy ivy that will spread and flop over the edges of the basket.



3 Add crocus 'Cream Beauty', without damaging any buds.



4 Hide soil gaps with winter aconites, white violas and *Iris reticulata* 'Katharine Hodgkin'.

Step-by-step
HOW TO POT UP



1 Having drilled drainage holes in the base, line the bowl with 2cm layer of gravel.



2 Fill the bowl three-quarters of the way with compost and firm down.



3 Let *Ipheion* 'Rolf Fiedler' drape. Place *Hyacinth* 'Peter Stuyvesant', in the centre.



4 Arrange clumps of grape hyacinths and the scillas, and insert puschkinias into gaps.



Style tip

For a natural look plant in odd-numbered groupings of between three and seven bulbs

Winter blues

It's surprising just how many plants there are that bear blue flowers during the cooler months of spring, ranging from baby blue to darker moody shades that mirror a wintry sky bringing snowfall. Many are miniature bulbs, such as irises, crocuses, grape hyacinths, windflowers, scillas, squills, hyacinths and ipheion, all widely available at garden centres, already planted in plastic pots that easily slot into larger container arrangements. Choose grape hyacinths, *Muscari* 'Peppermint', a small variety with spikes of light-blue flowers topped by greenish buds, while *Scilla siberica*, or Siberian squill, contrasts well with the steely-grey of the galvanised pot. *Puschkinia libanotica* looks charming perched on the edge next to leafy *Ipheion* 'Rolf Fiedler', the spring starflower. Finally, add hyacinths, with their gorgeous fragrance that will lure pollinating insects.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

+ Shallow metal container 30-40cm in diameter
+ *Hyacinth* 'Peter Stuyvesant'
+ *Scilla siberica*, Siberian squills
+ *Ipheion* 'Rolf Fiedler', spring star flowers
+ *Muscari* 'Peppermint', grape hyacinth
+ *Puschkinia libanotica*, striped squills

Boxed in

This is container gardening at its simplest: a wooden box filled with an all-time favourite, *Narcissus* 'Tête-À-Tête', a dwarf daffodil that starts flowering as early as March, and will still be budding in May. Reaching just 20cm tall, each bulb bears up to three neat, sunshine-yellow flowers per stem. It creates a splendid contrast alongside 'Valerie Finnis' grape hyacinths, a form with tightly packed ropes of blue flowers. It is not as invasive as its parent, *Muscari armeniacum*, and can be replanted in borders without fear it will take over.

Wooden boxes make lovely containers, or salvage wine boxes and fruit crates. Line first with plastic, then leave the wooden surface natural, or paint in a complementary shade. Container planting is infinitely adaptable and, the smaller the space, the bigger a part it plays. A large container makes greater impact as part of an arrangement – this box plays a key role surrounded by pots of skimmias, heathers, primulas, cyclamen, ornamental cabbages and emerging crocuses, set against a backdrop of red berries on a bamboo bush.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

+ Plastic lining
+ 1 wooden box
+ 3 pots *Narcissus* 'Tête-À-Tête'
+ 3 pots *Muscari armeniacum*, grape hyacinth

Care tip

After use, thoroughly dry wooden boxes and treat with a clear wood preservative

Step-by-step
HOW TO POT UP



1 Line the box with plastic and fill with specially formulated container compost.



2 Plant the grape hyacinths at the back, having first soaked and teased out the roots.



3 Plant the daffodils at the front of the box, wedging the bulbs tightly together.



4 Water well and deadhead regularly to keep the display going for more than six weeks.

Step-by-step
HOW TO POT UP



1 Put stones over the drainage hole. Three-quarters fill with specially formulated compost.



2 Tease out the skimmia roots. Plant the skimmia and lungwort in the centre.



3 Group the grape hyacinths & tulips around the skimmia.



4 Finally, insert the smallest plants, the violas, in the gaps at the edge of the container and water thoroughly.

Style tip

Emphasise the unusual purple and orange violas by planting more in several smaller pots nearby

Terracotta pot

At a time of year when tulips are once again enchanting with their dazzling flowers, it is easy to understand how tulip-mania took hold in the 17th century, and the price of new varieties escalated to such an extent that prize bulbs were fetching as much as luxury residences overlooking Amsterdam's canals. Only the fabulously rich could afford the rarest hybrids such as 'Semper Augustus'. Nowadays, tulip bulbs do not cost a fortune, and over many years, tulip breeders have produced perfectly formed blooms in an astonishing spectrum of colours.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **30cm high terracotta pot**
- **2 pots of 25cm *Tulipa* 'Yellow Angel'**
- **1 pot *Muscari armeniacum*, grape hyacinth**
- **2 annual violas**
- **1 *Pulmonaria* 'Blue Ensign'**
- **1 *Skimmia japonica***

An Easter basket

As some of the most spectacular bulbs emerge in an astonishing spectrum of colours, there's no mistaking that tulip season has begun. Among the earlier to flower are dwarf varieties such as 'Pinocchio' which, standing just 20cm high, has scarlet flowers with cream edges that open wide in the sunshine, measuring an amazing 10cm across. The leaves are handsome, adding interest to the basket for weeks after the flowers have faded.

'Pinocchio' tulips suit a colour scheme of red, purple, white and lime green. As a backdrop, try the sedge *Carex comans* 'Milk Chocolate', a tufted ornamental grass that looks wonderful from any angle. It goes well with *Euphorbia amygdaloides* 'Purpurea', a wood spurge with dark-purple stems and leaves with lime green flowers – choose a young plant that isn't too tall. Fill gaps with perennial daisies, not only to add ground cover with green rosettes of leaves, but also a long succession of nodding pinkish flowers which take over once the tulips have finished.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

+ 40cm woven rattan hanging basket
+ 2 pots of 'Pinocchio' dwarf tulips
+ 2 *Bellis perennis*, daisy
+ 1 *Carex comans* 'Milk Chocolate'
+ 1 *Euphorbia amygdaloides* 'Purpurea'
+ 1 *Saxifraga* 'Pixie'

Care tip

Keep several spare pots of key bulbs to hand, to replace any that fail or go over quickly



Step-by-step HOW TO POT UP



1 Plant the sedge in the centre where the soil is deepest, arranging tulips at the edges.



2 Plant the purple and lime green wood spurge beside the ornamental grass.



3 Place perennial daisies between tulips, spreading foliage to cover the bulbs.



4 Add *Saxifraga* 'Pixie'. Routinely remove tatty leaves to keep it looking its best.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS NICOLA STOCKEN

Pots of STYLE

Have your patio bursting with colour with these beautiful seasonal ideas

Heat resistant

With the hot weather now upon us, it's time to plant a drought-tolerant box with tough plants that can shrug off a little healthy neglect on a patio. Few plant families better fit the bill than ornamental grasses and 'Lollipop' verbena which is perfect for planting in the centre, so that its spikes of luminous purple flowers meld with the encircling grasses. Pile up compost around the verbena, before planting a different grass in each corner, filling in the gaps with soil and firming in. Finish with a mulch of gravel to help prevent evaporation while also helping the grasses pop.

Each ornamental grass has a very distinct character. *Carex comans* 'Frosted Curls' is a pretty sedge grass with drooping, silvery curls. *Carex comans* 'Bronze', a New Zealand hair sedge, has more body to it and forms dense tufts that tangle, and benefit from combing out with your fingers. *Stipa tenuissima* 'Pony Tails', Mexican feather grass, forms tufts that move with the breeze, and self-seeds just as freely. Finally, add a compact clump of evergreen blue fescue, *Festuca glauca*, with its dainty blue seedheads.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **Wooden box, around H30xW30xL40cm**
- **2ltr pots of the following:**
- ***Verbena bonariensis* 'Lollipop'**
- ***Carex comans* 'Frosted Curls'**
- ***Carex comans* 'Bronze'**
- ***Stipa tenuissima* 'Pony Tails'**
- ***Festuca glauca***

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 Line the box with a plastic sheet, making holes with scissors at regular intervals for drainage.



3 Plant the verbena in the centre of the box, with the sedges and blue fescue in the corners.



2 Add gravel to the bottom of the box for drainage. Fill with a good-quality potting compost.



4 The feather grass goes in the last corner. Trim the excess plastic lining and mulch with gravel.

Long-lasting display

The planting in this container is balanced and designed to be seen from every angle, so the tallest plant – the pink chrysanthemum – is placed centrally. Planted in late summer, 'pot mums' form mounds of daisy-like flowers in whites, yellows, purples and pinks of every shade, giving a garden an instant lift. Deadheading keeps the flowers coming until first frosts.

Around the edges of the pot, two Mexican feather grasses are planted opposite one another to add body. Then two white heathers are planted on opposite sides and, finally, four annual violas are placed between the heathers and grasses, adding splashes of purple and gold. The planting around the edges is long-lasting, so once the chrysanthemum is over, replace with cyclamen, which will keep the display going for a few weeks longer.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

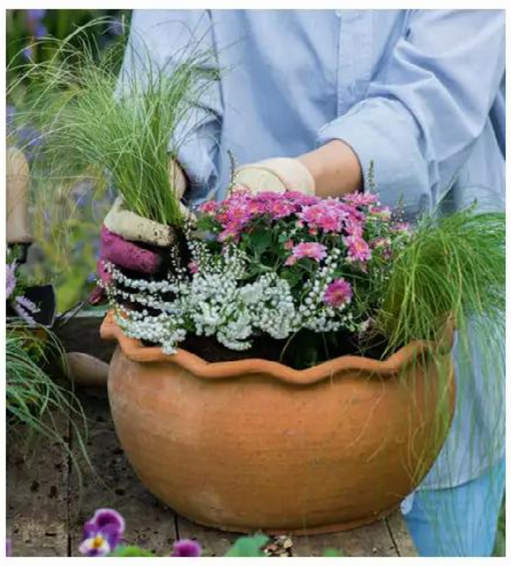
- **Rounded terracotta pot, around 35x25cm**
- **2ltr dwarf potted chrysanthemum**
- **2 x 1ltr pots of white heather**
- **2 x 1ltr pots of *Stipa tenuissima***
- **A selection of winter-flowering violas**

Late-summer pot planted with chrysanthemums, white heathers, winter-flowering annual violas, and *Stipa tenuissima*

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 Remove the potted chrysanthemum from its pot, carefully loosening the roots and place at the centre of the container.



2 Arrange the white heathers at opposite sides and place the grasses at the edge so they can trail over the sides.



3 Fill the final spaces around the edge of the container with the viola plants, making sure there are no large gaps.



4 Finish by topping up the container with potting compost and firming down to secure plants into position.

Sweet succulents

This vintage copper bowl is ideal for growing drought-tolerant succulents but if placed in an unsheltered spot, you'll need to drill a drainage hole in the base, covered with crocks and gravel, to prevent it being blocked by compost waterlogged by rain. Houseleeks, with their handsome clusters of spiralling rosettes, are especially rewarding to grow, sending up tall stems of cute pink blooms in summer. Each rosette is a separate plant that flowers once and then dies, only to be replaced by new rosettes, known as offsets, that can be potted up for next year.

Evergreen *Echeveria* also produces wonderfully decorative rosettes, the colours and spread varying considerably according to variety. *Sedum* such as 'Blue Cushion' also flourishes in containers, forming clumps of fleshy leaves in colours varying from grey or green to gold. Cooper's ice plant, *Delosperma cooperi*, is a delightful trailing evergreen succulent that bears vivid pink daisy-like flowers for weeks on end in summer. It is frost-tender, so is best overwintered in a conservatory or heated greenhouse.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **Vintage copper bowl, around 30-40cm diameter**
- **1ltr pot of *Delosperma cooperi***
- **Mixed *Sempervivum* and *Echeveria***
- ***Saxifraga cuneifolia* 'Variegata'**
- ***Sedum* 'Blue Cushion'**
- **Gravel or fine grit**
- **Sea shells and small pebbles**

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 A 1cm-deep layer of gravel is sprinkled in the bowl over drainage holes.



3 *Saxifraga cuneifolia* 'Variegata' and other succulents are inserted.



2 Pink-flowered Cooper's ice plant is positioned in the soil along one edge.



4 The soil is covered in a layer of gravel, up to the neck of each plant.



Vintage copper bowl planted with *Delosperma cooperi*, mixed *Sempervivum* and *Echeveria*, *Sedum* 'Blue Cushion' and *Saxifraga cuneifolia* 'Variegata'

Soft focus

Unearthing salvage containers is not only great fun, but will also give your garden a unique character, individuality and timeless appeal, at very little cost. This copper pot, rescued from a charity shop with a £1 price tag, is but one of a host of treasures to be found while rummaging in reclamation yards, local car boot or garage sales, and even auctions, especially those with an agricultural theme.

The arrangement is grounded in handsome foliage that makes up for a dwindling number of flowers for when autumn comes. There are purple and silver *Heuchera* leaves, flowing Mexican feather grasses, and the palmate, toothed leaves of the Japanese anemone – a compact, long-flowering form that co-stars alongside purple verbena, waylaying passing butterflies with nectar-rich flowers.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **A pot, measuring around 40x30cm**
- **2ltr pots of the following plants:**
- ***Verbena bonariensis* 'Lollipop'**
- ***Stipa tenuissima***
- ***Heuchera* 'Sugar Plum'**
- ***Anemone hupehensis* 'Pocahontas' (Fantasy Series)**

Flowering until autumn, a copper pot with *Verbena bonariensis*, *Stipa tenuissima*, *Heuchera* 'Sugar Plum', and *Anemone hupehensis* 'Pocahontas' (Fantasy Series), a dwarf Japanese anemone

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 Having thoroughly cleaned the pot, drill a few holes in the bottom and add gravel to provide good drainage.



2 Fill with general-purpose potting compost formulated for containers and remove each plant from its pot, teasing out the roots.



3 Place the *Verbena bonariensis* off-centre, on the side and add the *Heuchera* so the leaves soften the edges.



4 Add the grasses so they spill over the edges then insert the pink anemone towards the centre of the pot.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS NICOLA STOCKEN

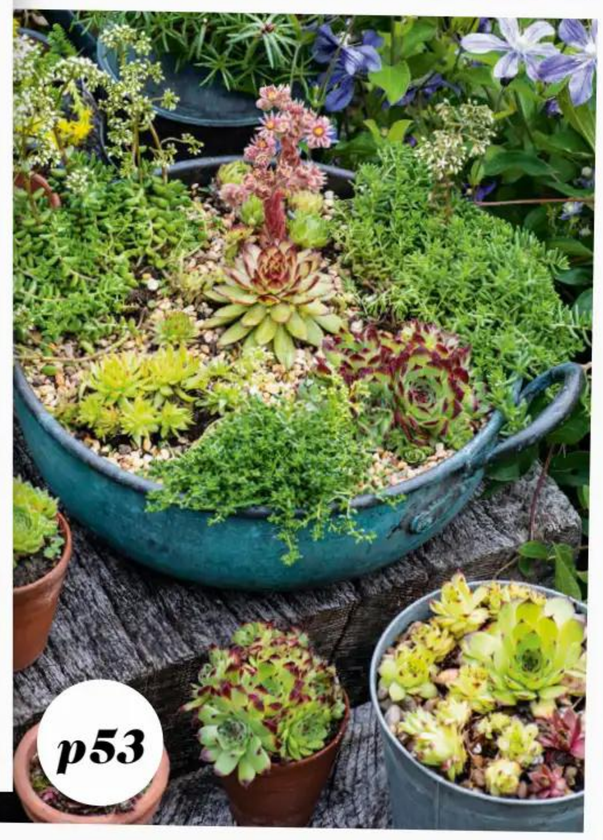
Summer
POT RECIPES

These four beautiful containers can be planted up now and will get better and better over the season



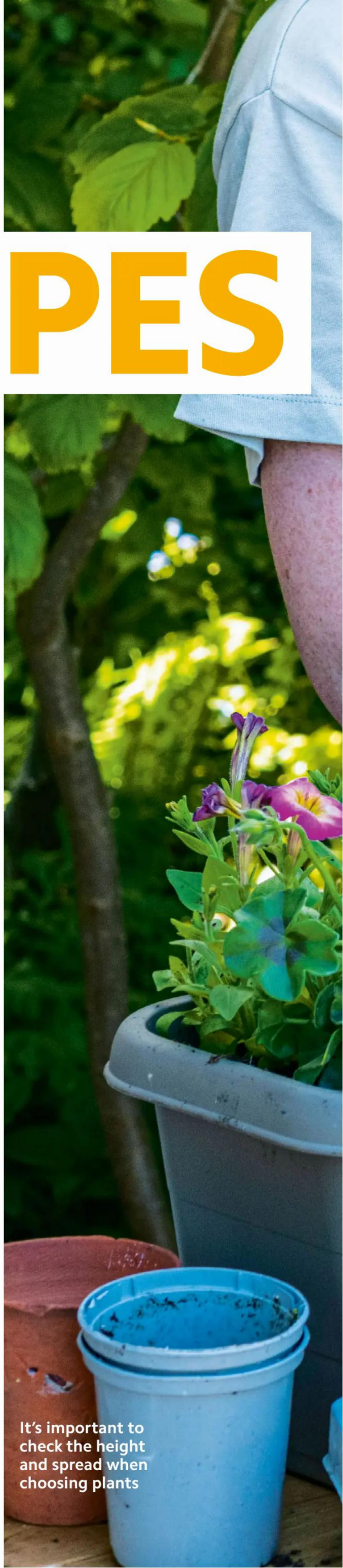






With container gardening, success relies on a few key guidelines. First, balancing the size of a pot with the spread of the plants once fully grown and making sure that no single plant grows too big to overwhelm the others. Checking plant labels for the height and spread when making a selection will help. Secondly, you'll need to select plants which favour similar growing conditions. Unless the plants require special mixtures, a multipurpose compost is often sufficient. You can also add water-retentive gel to help retain moisture in hot spells.

Whether you prefer a pretty mix of flowers to suit a cottage garden scheme or a more modern look, our step-by-step guides will show you how to create beautiful displays you'll love this summer.



It's important to check the height and spread when choosing plants

Top tip

It's essential to keep watering your container regularly, especially during the summer months, and never allow the compost to dry out completely

Cottage garden planter

Choose a good-sized pot that's big enough to take a rose and some smaller plants around the edge. We've gone for a traditional look with a terracotta pot, which would suit a classic cottage garden style. Cover the bottom of the pot with some crocks to assist drainage – we're using some broken up polystyrene plug plant trays to line ours.

The plants we have chosen will thrive better in well-drained soil. The crocks plus a layer of gravel will help with drainage. Add enough to cover the base and some of the crocks.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **Lobelia 'Cambridge Blue'**
- **Patio rose 'Lovely Bride'**
- **White bacopa**
- **Mixed Nemesias**
- **Terracotta pot**
- **Crocks**
- **Gravel**
- **Compost**

AFTERCARE

Keep deadheading throughout the season and some plants will give you a second flush of flowers. If any perennials you've used get too big, lift and divide them to grow your plant collection and prevent overcrowding. They could be planted in a separate pot, or you could find a permanent home for them in a well chosen spot in a border.

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 Once you've added a layer of crocks and gravel, fill the pot to around ¾ full with a good all-purpose peat-free compost. Make a hole in the centre of the pot, moving the soil to the sides. This will be where the central rose will be placed.



3 Plant lobelia tight around the sides of the pot and space the nemesias evenly around the edge. Intersperse with white bacopa to tumble over the edges. Pack extra compost around each plant. Firm down the compost around the plants.



2 Carefully remove the patio rose from its pot, and pop the pot in the hole so you can plant around it – that way you know how much space to leave for planting the rose. Build up and firm the soil around the pot, ready to plant annuals around the edge.



4 Next, remove the pot from the hole and lower the rose gently into position. Firm it into place and add a little more soil to ensure it's properly planted in. Once you are happy that all the plants are firmly in position, give your finished container a good watering.

Bright window box

There are so many options for window boxes. For starters they can be placed anywhere – not just windowsills. You can use them to line a patio or path edge or mount them on a wall, balcony or fence. Be sure to follow the 'right plant, right place' principle and you'll have a greater chance of growing success.

For sunny windowsills, pelargoniums, verbenas and petunias are brilliant. In shady spots, you can still get plenty of colour from shade-tolerant nicotiana and calendula. Select a plant for height in the centre, combine with filler plants, and finish with trailers to tumble down the front. You could even add an edible in the mix such as a chive or nasturtium.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **Geranium 'Bullseye' mix**
- **Trailing fuchsias 'Harry Gray' and 'La Campanella'**
- **Calibrachoa 'Double PinkTastic'**
- **Geranium 'Ivy Flair'**
- **Petunia 'Single Rose' F1**
- **75cm long window box**
- **Gravel**
- **Compost**

AFTERCARE

With everything planted and watered, you can now fix your window box into place in your preferred location. Make sure boxes are fixed securely especially on upstairs windows to prevent them falling and causing accidents. Deadhead any flowers regularly to keep your display looking its best as well as encouraging more growth and for a longer display.

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 **Start by filling your window box with a layer of gravel – this will help with drainage. Then fill the garden planter with a good all-round peat-free compost until it's an inch or two from the top of the window box. Prepare your plants for planting.**



3 **Remove the plant from the pot and guide it into place, gently firming down the soil around it. Carry on with the other plants until everything is in place, then add extra soil to ensure the plants are sitting level with the top of the compost.**



2 **The Geranium Bullseye Mix is upright so place this at the back. The trailing plants such as Geranium 'Ivy Flair', Calibrachoa and trailing fuchsias go at the front as these are going to cascade over the side. Then add your petunias as filler plants.**

4 **Give everything a good water and remember your plant choices will determine how regularly you need to water. But it's important to keep in mind that pot-grown plants always require slightly more watering than those in our garden borders.**

Top tip

Arrange the two different kinds of English lavender, with the shorter variety nearer the front of the pot to ensure it creates the most impact in your display.

Pretty herb pot

Creating a herb container is a great starting point for you to begin trying to grow your own edibles. They are excellent container plants and can be placed on a patio or balcony, so it doesn't matter about the size of your garden. And even if you have no outdoor space they can be grown inside on a windowsill. Plug plants and larger potted herbs are widely available from garden centres and online, but you can also sow your own seeds.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- ***Lavandula angustifolia*, English lavender**
- **Lemon thyme**
- **Golden oregano**
- **Chives**
- **Curled parsley**
- **Golden sage**
- **Rosemary**
- **Large pot**
- **Container compost**
- **Gravel**
- **Crocks (we've used broken up polystyrene seedling trays which the plants came in)**

AFTERCARE

Now that you've completed your herb container, find a sheltered but sunny spot for it. Water regularly, particularly during hot weather, but try not to overwater – at no point should the compost become saturated. When it comes to harvesting them pick the herbs little and often, taking care not to cut too much from one plant.

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 Take your container and start by adding crocks to the bottom to help with drainage. Then pour in some gravel to cover the drainage hole and to help prevent compost from leaking out of the pot. Pick your plants ready for planting.



3 Gently ease the herbs from their pots, avoiding damaging the rootballs and plant in the planned position. Once you're happy with how the pot is looking, firm them in place. Add extra compost to make sure any gaps are filled.



2 Fill the pot to within 15cm of the top with compost. Then try out different positions with the plants still in their pots. Take into account contrasting leaf colours, textures and shapes. Once finalised you can begin planting into position.



4 Once you've finished securing your arrangement, watering plants is next on the list. Make sure you give your herb display a good soaking with a watering can. Then find a nice spot on your patio where you can take in the scent.

Contemporary succulent bowl

Aside from their beautiful structures and vast array of shades, succulents are surprisingly easy to grow. Being naturally hardy they can tolerate an array of climates, though some may need to be brought inside during cold periods.

Their popularity means that succulents are widely available at garden centres. There are a huge range to choose from and they make a stunning mixed display in pots.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about succulents is that they require excellent drainage. So drainage holes are an absolute must in whatever pot you're planting in.

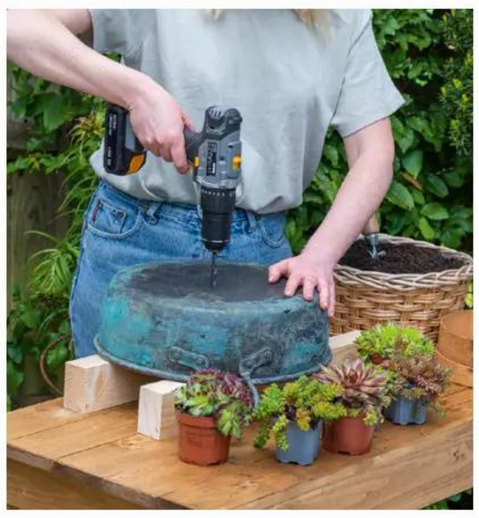
WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **Large copper bowl (or similar design)**
- **Electric drill**
- **Safety goggles**
- **3 x different sedums to spread and trail**
- **3 x different sempervivum to stand proud, flowering later in season**
- **Fine horticultural grit**
- **Succulent potting mix or mix your own with 50% top soil, 40% compost and 10% gravel**
- **Artist's brush**

AFTERCARE

Once you've finished your container make sure you position it out of direct sunlight as the leaves of succulents can get scorched by the sun. We think it would work brilliantly on a garden table as the centrepiece. When it comes to watering plants, it's just as easy to over-water as it is to under-water, so allow your container to dry out between waterings.

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 Place your copper bowl upside down on a couple of wooden blocks on a steady surface. Wearing safety goggles drill drainage holes in the base of the copper bowl. Brush away any remnants of copper before turning over to begin planting.



3 Next, you need to cover the drainage holes with a layer of gravel, then add your compost. Ease the succulents out of their pots one by one and place in their planting hole. Do this with care so as not to disturb the rootballs as you add them to the pot.



2 Before adding anything to the pot, keep the succulents in their plastic pots and plan your arrangement. This will ensure you can create your desired balance between the different shapes and shades of the leaves before you plant them.



4 Firm the compost around each succulent, ensuring the soil does not cover the neck of the plant. Sprinkle over a mulch of fine grit, building up around the neck of the plants. Brush away any excess grit on the leaves with a brush. Water thoroughly.

WORDS TERESA CONWAY
PHOTOGRAPHS FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM



Summer CONTAINERS

This seasonal pot inspo is ideal for creating a vibrant spot on your patio or balcony in the warmer months

Pots and containers come into their own in the warmer weather, with such a wide selection of flowering plants to choose from that are at their very best. It's the perfect season for creating beautiful planters to brighten up your outdoor space. From ideas for large patios and decks to more modest terraces and balconies where space is tight, there are plenty of planting schemes that'll work for you. A simple mix of colour, texture and form, using containers in a variety of heights and sizes, has maximum impact. Whether you like tiny terracotta pots featuring individual flowers or large tubs packed with a range of plants, you'll be needing ideas and inspiration on how to create successful colour schemes and planting combinations that work for your space.

Opt for low-maintenance blooms

Plant up pretty pelargoniums in containers to create a lovely summery mood. Pelargoniums promise abundant blooms, and these diverse flowering beauties score highly with their bright colours as well as requiring very little care.

'Pelargoniums are incredibly robust and easy to care for, so are perfect for container gardening,' says Dr Suzanne Lux of Pelargonium for Europe. 'They bloom abundantly and continuously without you having to take special care of them. To ensure the plants develop well, the containers should have a diameter of about 20cm or hold at least two litres of soil.'

Suzanne recommends planting pelargoniums individually in pots and placing several next to each other to build up a central display for your patio. They will thrive in even the smallest pots and won't need lots of watering either. In full sun to partial shade locations, standing, semi-trailing and trailing pelargoniums are ideal as a planting theme.

Bring colour to your patio with a splendid display of seasonal favourites

Fill a hanging basket with tumbling flowers

Make a great first impression at the front of your property with a summer hanging basket crammed with beautiful blooms. Choose colourful options with lush foliage that will spill generously over the edges of the basket to create a naturalistic look.

Some of the best plants for hanging baskets include calibrachoa (million bells) with its trumpet-like flowers in a wide range of colours, clouds of dainty lobelia, and trailing petunias – and look out especially for the gorgeous petunias with ruffled double blooms that will add a touch of luxe to your display.



Hanging baskets, like this one from Squires Garden Centres, add summer colour



Plant up vintage-look containers

Characterful old containers, pots and planters can be picked up for little expense in charity shops and online. This vintage-style tin bath is planted with pelargoniums, lupins, zinnia, foxgloves and ivy for an untamed look that's right on trend.

'My favourite material for containers is galvanised metal,' says Arthur Parkinson, who hosts a series of inspirational online courses on planting summer pots for Create Academy and is known for his unrivalled ability to create planters of gorgeous, deeply coloured flowers. 'Be like a magpie to hunt your container down. Look on eBay and Preloved, and choose tub-shaped ones with handles. As well as being roomy enough for lots of plants, they're easy to move around.'

Galvanised buckets are good, too. 'They're widely available; just remember to add drainage holes in the bottom if you find one,' says Arthur. This will help prolong their life as you don't want the bottom to rot. Using plenty of grit or other drainage material in the base will ensure water flows freely, too.



Try an unstructured look

Loose and airy planting of flowers, such as trailing petunias, cosmos, achillea and Verbena bonariensis, lets you create a wonderfully natural and unstructured look like this option from Crocus.

Offering sumptuous colour all summer long, the trailing petunia 'Tidal Wave Red' looks wonderful with its rich, velvety red flowers spilling over the edges of a pot. It thrives in full sun and moderately fertile, well-drained soil, flowering from late spring to the first frosts.

Petunias are a really versatile choice for seasonal containers. Choose from trumpet-shaped or double-ruffled blooms, or more subtle ones featuring delicate marbling detail on their petals. They look particularly spectacular planted in a solid colour block of magenta pink, inky purple or dark crimson.

Pick white flowers for a cool summer vibe

Choosing one colour for your planting scheme is an easy way to create a professional look for your containers and none is more elegant than white.

Bright and breezy daisy-like cosmos add height, floaty texture and luminous white flowers to containers all summer long. They're easy to grow, love the sun and don't need much looking after. Just snip off the flowers as they fade and more will keep coming.

Fill out your display with verbena to add another layer of abundant, pure-white blooms. Very easy to grow, they will flower reliably all summer as long as your container is in a sunny spot and has well-drained compost.

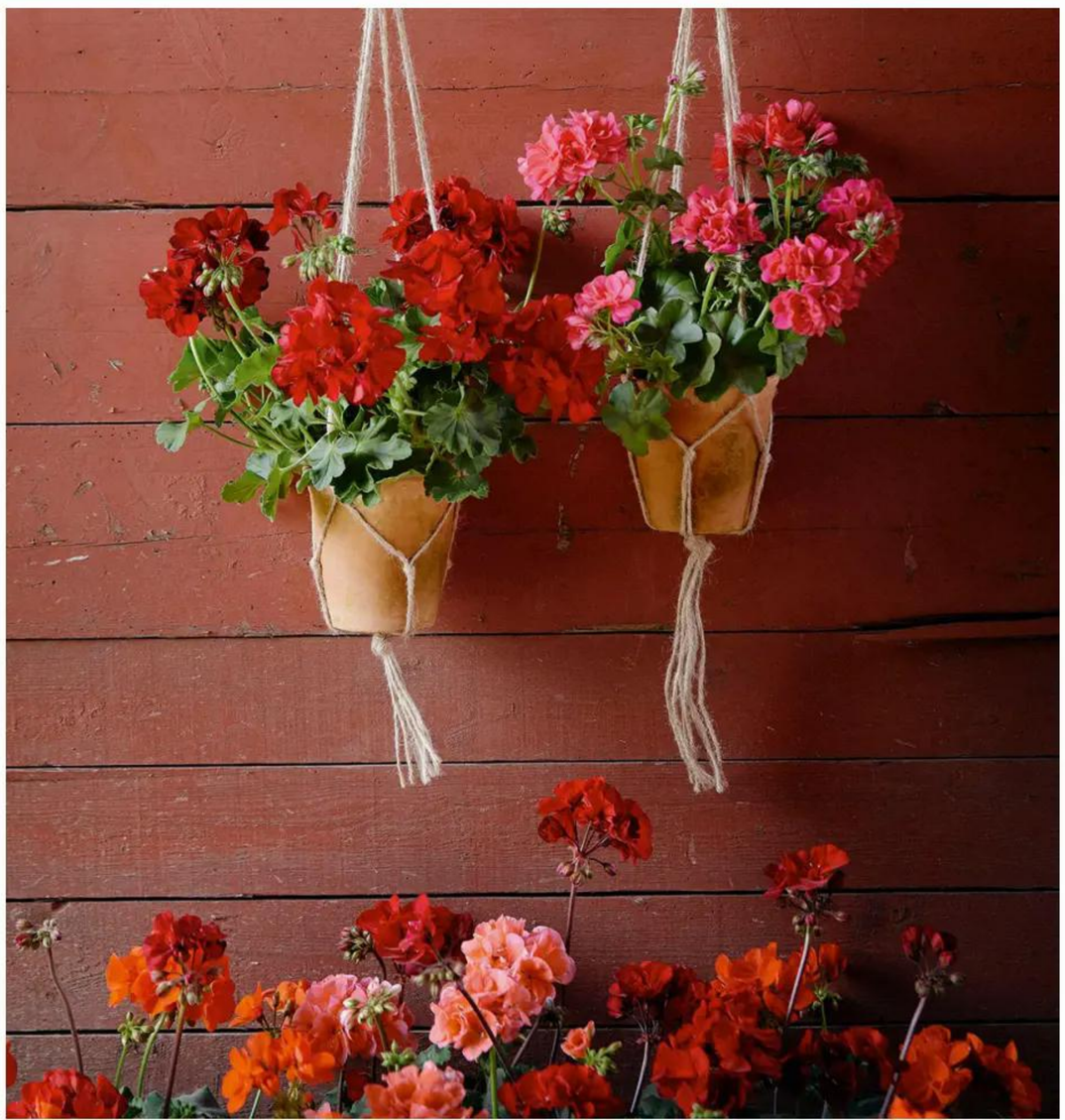
Both cosmos and verbena are easy choices if you're new to gardening, and they both come in jewel-bright colours, too, if you're going for a bolder look.

Go for rustic macramé hanging pots

Macramé – the art of knotting string – is simple enough to try at home yourself, with plenty of online tutorial videos to guide you if you're unsure. The finished pieces are ideal for holding your hanging pots.

As mentioned before, we love happy-go-lucky pelargoniums. They look great planted up in quite small pots that can then be grouped together to create a display, like this pretty example from Pelargonium for Europe.

Just remember to keep snipping off any faded flowers to encourage more blooms and keep on enjoying the Mediterranean vibe.



WORDS SARAH WILSON **PHOTOGRAPHS** FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM, ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, GETTY IMAGES, JONATHAN BUCKLEY, PELARGONIUM FOR EUROPE



Stick with the formula: thriller, filler, pillar, spiller

Head gardener Josie Lewis works at Sarah Raven's Perch Hill and is amazing at getting the right combinations for pots. She always considers form and scale as well as colour as the main criteria for creating the best eye-catching containers.

Josie suggests sticking with the following easy-to-remember formula: 'First choose a thriller – something dominant you love for wow factor. Then choose a filler, which backs up your thriller and is a similar colour. Next comes a pillar to add height and scale. Finally, add a spiller that tumbles over the edge of the pot.'

Your summer containers shouldn't be a fixed thing either. 'Never think of your garden containers as a permanent show,' says Arthur Parkinson. 'Choose containers with handles as that makes it easier to move things around to create nice combinations. What I love most about pot gardening is that it's a continual rotation of ideas tying in with the seasons.'

Summer Window Box Collection, Sarah Raven

Time for BULBS

Don’t miss out on planting up one or more of these bulb displays in autumn for fabulous displays to look forward to in spring





Stunning tulips

Tulips are the absolute stars of spring and are available in such an incredible range of colours. From classic reds, yellows and pinks, to dramatic dark shades for more contemporary looks.

We selected a deep pinky purple variety, 'Pink Parrot' and a gorgeous white variety 'Diana'. The plan being that they will create impact with a strong contrast between the two.

Leave your pot in a sheltered spot which gets a good amount of sun. As an additional guard against hungry foraging squirrels (this goes for all your bulb displays), fit some chicken wire over the tulips once they're planted. You can remove it once the bulbs emerge. It's a good idea to plant up a couple of spare pots of any leftover tulip bulbs in case of no-shows next spring.

PLANT LIST

- ***Tulipa* 'Diana'**
- ***Tulipa* 'Pink Parrot'**
- **White cyclamen**

Step-by-step



1 Take a terracotta pot and use crocs and gravel to cover the drainage hole, fill with some polystyrene. Pour in compost to about four-fifths full.



2 Using a trowel, measure your bulbs from top to tip to work out 3x the height for the appropriate depth to plant them.



3 Firm the compost down and score with 4 circles, starting in the centre, and increasing in diameter towards the outer edge of the pot.



4 Plant the white *Tulipa* 'Diana' close together in the outer circle, pushing in about 2cm. Ensure you plant with the pointed end of the bulb uppermost!



5 Plant dark 'Pink Parrot' tulips on next circle in, maintaining same distance apart between tulips. Plant the two remaining circles, alternating the bulbs.



6 Fill with compost and firm. Plant a baby white cyclamen in the centre and 3 others around it for instant interest until the bulbs pop up in spring.



Perky window box

In the dark days of January and February, what better way to perk up your front garden than with a window box full to the brim with happy colour!

We've packed in as many bulbs as possible into this arrangement, plus used euphorbia, violas, two types of narcissus, delicate muscari and a hellebore.

Once planted, position your window box in a sheltered spot, in the sun is preferable but it will cope if it's slightly in shade too. The hellebores and two baby euphorbias will give you instant colour throughout the season so leave it somewhere you can admire it from inside the house. After the window box has finished its display, both the hellebore and euphorbia can be planted out in a permanent home in a bed or border.



Narcissus 'Smiling Sun', flowers from mid March for a few weeks if regularly dead-headed

PLANT LIST

- T2 x *Helleborus niger* 'Christmas Carol'
- 2 x *Euphorbia* 'Ascot Rainbow'
- Violas
- *Narcissus* 'Jetfire'
- *Narcissus* 'Smiling Sun'
- *Muscari* 'Siberian Tiger'

Step-by-step



1 Wash out the window box with warm soapy water. Cover the drainage holes with a layer of coarse gravel. Next fill the container about three-quarters full of compost and firm down.



2 Evenly position the euphorbias, hellebores and violas (still in their plastic pots and twisting them into the compost), along the window box to decide on how your want the arrangement to look.



3 Lift the plants out carefully without damaging the root ball, leaving the empty plastic pots in position to show the planting hole, and providing a guide to help position the bulbs.



4 Plant the two varieties of daffodil bulbs alternately along the box at a depth of 3x the bulb height. Group in clumps of 5 or 7. 'Jetfire' will flower first next January, followed closely by 'Smiling Sun'.



5 Add 2cm of compost so the daffodils tips are just peeping through. Fill remaining space with a river of 'Siberian Tiger'. if dead-headed this grape hyacinth should flower alongside both narcissi.



6 Water the arrangement then fill the window box with compost up to the top of the plastic pots. Remove each plastic pot, carefully inserting the plant in its place, without disturbing the bulbs.

All the pinks

Pink is a fantastic colour for the garden. On the colour wheel, pink sits on the opposite side to green which means when these colours are used together, they are extremely complementary, and help each other 'zing'.

There are plenty of pink spring bulb varieties to choose from, but we're using *Tulipa* 'Little Girl', pink cyclamen, pink violas all planted around a statement central ornamental cabbage.

Your pot can sit happily outside in a sheltered spot for the winter season. With the ornamental cabbage giving colour interest and looking pretty striking, you'll want to have it somewhere it can be admired. Never allow your pot to dry out - those winter winds are dehydrating, so check the soil weekly with your finger to ensure it is damp.

PLANT LIST

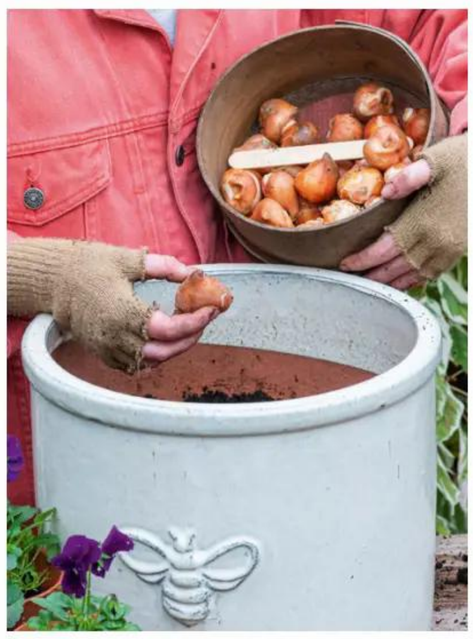
- ***Tulipa greigii***
- **Pink cyclamen**
- **Mixed annual violas, *Viola* x *wittrockiana***
- **Central pink ornamental cabbage**



Step-by-step



1 Add gravel over the drainage holes. Work out the depth required by tulips planted at 3–4 x height of bulb, and fill pot with compost accordingly.



2 Pack all the tulip bulbs in one dense layer. Fill the pot up with compost and firm it down, then make a hole to take the ornamental cabbage.



3 Plant the central pink ornamental cabbage in the hole. It will sit a little proud above some tulips until it is over (early Jan) when it will be removed.



4 Plant the cyclamen and the violas around the cabbage. The tulips have very pointed shoots, so they will be able push their way out.



5 Cover the compost with a 2cm layer of gravel to deter squirrels from foraging in the display and leaving you with no blooms come spring.



6 If you have any leftover bulbs, then plant up a couple of spare pots to guard against no-shows and disappointment next spring.





Lasagne extravaganza

A bulb lasagne is two or more layers of bulbs, planted in the same pot. This is a clever way of giving you months of spring colour, with early bulbs like snowdrops and iris putting on a show in February followed by narcissi and then tulips. This method is also referred to as successional planting.

For this particular bulb lasagne we've chosen winter aconites, crocus, irises and narcissus bulbs as well as some ivy and pretty blue trailing periwinkles. As each layer is planted, water it well.

Cover the soil with a layer of gravel because this will both deter hungry rodents, but also prevent soil from splashing up and soiling the beautiful, pristine petals once the flowers emerge.

The planter will look quite bare at this stage before the bulbs emerge, but the trailing ivy and periwinkles will give a bit of interest.

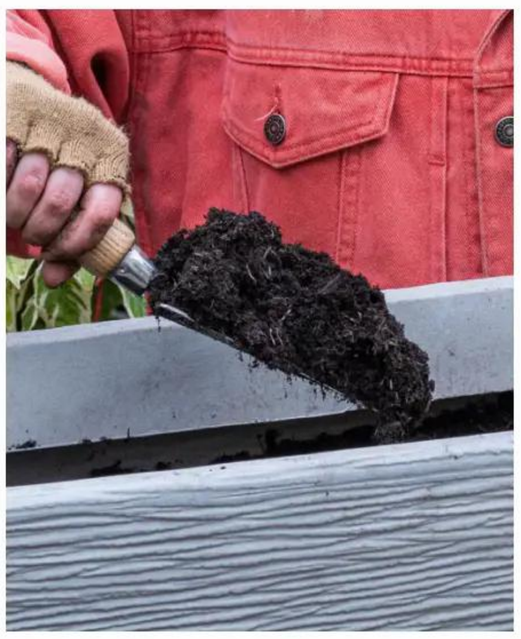
PLANT LIST

- **Winter aconite, *Eranthis hyemalis***
- ***Crocus fuscotinctus***
- ***Iris reticulata* 'Harmony'**
- **Narcissus 'Sweetness'**
- **Variegated ivies and periwinkles to trail over the edges**
- **2 x baby *Carex oshimensis* to plant above narcissus until February**

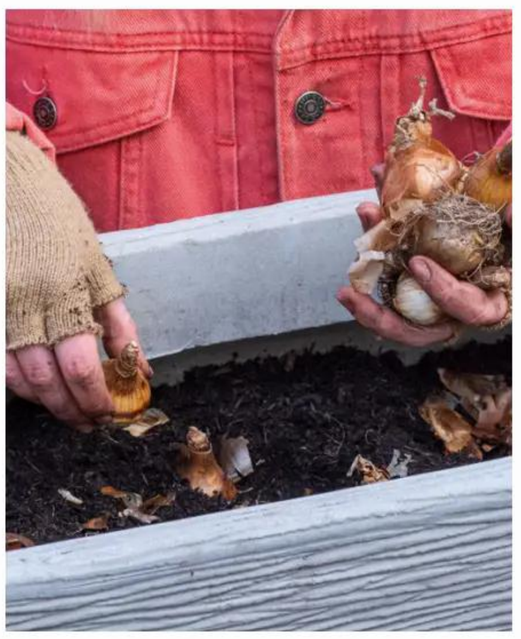
Step-by-step



1 Check whether you need to enlarge the holes at the base of your planter as you want to be sure the soil won't get waterlogged. They were rather small in this one for the drainage needed.



2 Cover the drainage holes of your planter with plenty of crocks and add a layer of gravel over the base to assist drainage. Then fill the planter with compost to about three-quarters full.



3 Take the largest and latest flowering bulbs – the Narcissus 'Sweetness' – and plant these first in the deepest layer, placing them in 5 groups of 7 bulbs. Then water this layer.



4 Use small sticks to mark the location of each narcissus group, then squeeze the ivy and periwinkle into 2 corners and the middle, so that they can trail over the edge. Cover with 3cm of soil.

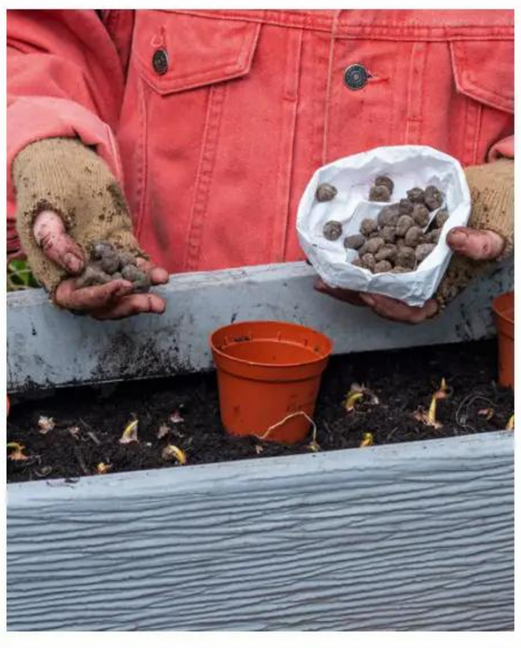




The delightful yellow *Crocus fuscotinctus* emerges in midwinter



5 In the middle layer, plant the *Iris reticulata* 'Harmony', positioning them in the gaps between the narcissus bulbs. Cover with another 2cm layer of soil, and water.



6 Plant the winter aconites and crocuses next (the earliest and smallest) on the top layer, leaving space for the carex. Scatter aconites randomly throughout the planter for a natural look.



7 To add interest until the bulbs emerge, position 3 x baby *Carex oshimensis* above the narcissus. Be ready to remove the grasses in February, early March when the narcissi start sprouting.



8 Cover with 5cm of soil, and water. Top with fine horticultural grit. Winter aconites establish best 'in the green', so keep your plants damp to encourage the tiny dry tubers to sprout.

12 TOP TIPS FOR SEASONAL BULBS

1 Don't scrimp on the amount you plant. If you want to create impact, you can never have enough bulbs. If you were thinking of planting 10 bulbs in a pot the trick is to double it. In fact, it won't harm to see if you can squeeze in a few more on top!

2 If you're opting for mixing up bulb varieties in one pot, put the biggest bulbs at the bottom and the smallest ones on top, layering them up with plenty of soil in between.

3 Squirrels love to forage for bulbs in containers. Place some chicken wire or other mesh over the pot once you've planted it up to stop them digging. As soon as the bulbs start to peek through, you can remove it.

4 If you're planting in the ground and want your bulbs to look natural, simply throw a handful down and plant them where they land. If you prefer a more structured look, arrange them in clumps closer together.



A layer of grit on top of the soil looks good and keeps moisture in

5 Always buy bulbs from a reputable supplier. Don't buy from unknown sources on the internet, where bulbs may have been taken illegally from the wild.

6 The bigger the bulb the better. So when selecting yours make sure you opt for the plumpest ones as these will be the best growers.

7 If you're planting lots of bulbs in a bed or border, then try using a bulb planting tool which will give precision and make life much easier.

9 Plant bulbs as soon as you can after they arrive. The exception is tulips, which shouldn't be planted until November or later.

10 Bulbs HATE waterlogged soil as they can rot. So drainage holes and gravel are essential for the bottom of your containers. Water straight after planting and thereafter when the soil is dry to the touch.

11 When the flowers of your snowdrops, daffodils and muscari, have faded, it's time to lift and divide the bulbs to increase your stocks. Do this when they still have their leaves. Dig up the clump, ease the plants apart and get rid of damaged or diseased bulbs. Divide them into small groups and replant some in the original hole and others in new positions.

12 As a general rule, bulbs like to be planted at a depth of 2-3 times their own height and they don't like to touch each other, so leave at least a bulb's width in between.

WORDS TERESA CONWAY
PHOTOGRAPHS NICOLA STOCKEN/FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM



8 For container displays, think about combining your bulbs with other plants to give early interest before the bulbs pop up in spring. Try ornamental cabbages or hellebores as statement central plants. Trailing ivy and periwinkles can also be used to soften the edges of your container.



Muscari armeniacum 'Siberian Tiger', white grape hyacinth, take over as the daffodils start to fade, flowering until late April

Last-minute COLOUR

Give your garden a final burst of colour with these late-season pots

Summer pots are great, but the hot weather means that they require a lot of watering to keep them going. In autumn, we're at an in-between time in the season and there's no reason that your garden should be devoid of colour. It's possible to plant up a display that will take you all the way through autumn!

Most of the flowering plants mentioned in these fabulous pot recipes will be readily available in garden centres and can be potted up straight away alongside colourful foliage plants. Look for tempting pots of late bloomers, and there will be plenty of bedding bargains, plus fresh stocks of hardy plants coming in from September to add a pop to your pots.



Delicate crocus

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- **20 x corms of *Crocus speciosus* 'Conquerer'**
- **2 x *Calluna vulgaris* 'Alicia'**

This uses a type of crocus which flowers in autumn. The remaining bright days encourage the blooms to open wide, showing their bold orange stigmas. Plant the corms as early as possible and they'll be up in a matter of weeks. You can try and buy ready-grown versions at garden centres. Place them as deep as possible in a pot (about 12cm is ideal). You can then dig up the corms in late spring and replant them in your garden.

Ace acers

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- **1 x *Acer palmatum* 'Dissectum'**
- **1 x *Ceratostigma***
- **1 x potted cyclamen**
- **1 x dwarf chrysanthemum**
- **2 x *Carex oshimensis* 'Evergold'**

Acers are an eye-catching species, even more so when their leaves change colour in autumn. Make sure the acer is planted in free-draining compost, peat-based ericaceous is preferred. You can mix your own by adding three parts peat to one part potting bark. Avoid John Innes as it's a bit heavy. Make sure your pot is big enough to accommodate all your plants.

Perfect asters

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- **1 x aster (dwarf)**
- **1 x *Carex morrowii* 'Ice Dance'**
- **2 x potted cyclamen**
- **1 x ornamental cabbage**
- **3 x pansies**
- **1 x *Heuchera***

Asters are wonderful plants for a burst of colour through autumn. They can be susceptible to mildew, so look for resistant varieties such as *Aster amellus*. Buying seasonal plants and potting them into container displays is the perfect quick-fix for a late show. Something like this can also be planted into your borders after they've flowered. Once the asters are finished, replace them with winter pansies and heathers, and pop in some easy flowering bulbs for a succession of colour which will take you to spring!

Tropical feels

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- 1 x *Canna* 'Lucifer'
- 1 x *Pennisetum glaucum* 'Purple Baron'
- 2 x pots Asiatic lily
- 2 x *Lantana*
- 2 x *Nicotiana*
- 3 x pots nasturtium
- 1 x *Lysimachia*

The combination of these flowers in the last of the summer sun will give such a boost to your patio or balcony. The lively orange-yellow blooms of *Lantana* make the reds of the lilies more intense. This combo is great for bees and butterflies too. The nasturtiums around the edge of the pot will trail nicely down the sides. Position this close to the house as it will provide a couple of extra degrees when temperatures plummet at night.

Dahlia delight

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- **1 x Dahlia 'Art Deco'**
- **1 x Foxtail Barley**
- **1 x *Scaevola aemula* 'Zig Zag'**

For flower colour and fabulous shape, as well as interesting foliage, dahlias are hard to beat. The bright orange variety 'Art Deco' is the perfect centrepiece to a trailing scaevola. Dahlias can be pricey but do vary depending on their variety, so you should be able to find reasonably priced ones if you are on a budget. Dahlias are frost-sensitive, so make sure you plant them in a frost-proof container.

Magenta magic

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- **3 x *Imperata cylindrica* 'Red Baron'**
- **1 x *Heuchera***
- **4 x cyclamen**
- **3 x *Helichrysum***
- **3 x *Sedum sieboldii***

The pale green shade of this container is so well-matched to the light green marbling of the cyclamen foliage. Colour coordinating the pots and plants together is all part of the fun. All these plants can be picked up from good nurseries and online, and will relish in a sunny spot right through to November. They'll withstand the frosts if you keep them in a sheltered space.

WORDS WENDY HUMPHRIES
PHOTOGRAPHS GAP PHOTOS

Hardy BEAUTIES

We have six recipes for eye-catching containers that are sure to bring you good cheer in the darkest time of year













In the race against time to prepare for Christmas, nothing beats seasonal pots for providing splashes of cheery colour outdoors. As the shortest day approaches, the brightest, longest-lasting flowers are the most appealing, promising a lovely display well into the New Year.

However, winds are surprisingly dehydrating, so check that containers do not dry out. Grouping pots not only provides each with protection, but also has much greater visual impact. Mix and match different styles, such as warm terracotta with copper verdigris or glazed pottery with contemporary steel, ensuring that the eventual size of plants are in proportion with the size and shape of the pot. Plus, it's better to overfill than to have an underwhelming display later.

These six pot recipes will bring beauty to your garden during the winter. Be sure to position them where they can be seen and enjoyed near the house.

WINTER HARDY BEAUTIES

Plant up a colourful selection of seasonal plants in a decorative container, and keep it within view of the house to enjoy on cold days

Evergreen display

To guarantee a good show at this time of year, plant up a container with the toughest winter plants. Ornamental cabbages are great value, while autumn-flowering cyclamen provide months of interest with marbled foliage that far outlives the dainty red, pink or white flowers. Evergreen skimmias and hellebores also have handsome foliage partnering their blooms, while ivies – variegated or plain green – are perfect for trailing over the sides. And metallic *Calocephalus* 'Silver Sand' does well with bright colours, but only survives in frost-free spots.

Extend flowering by underplanting with bulbs such as dwarf daffodils, winter aconites or crocuses. Plant with their tips showing, leaving space for the other leafy plants around them. Position the container on a south-facing patio close to the house walls.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- Vintage copper pot, around 40x30cm
- *Helleborus niger* 'Christmas Carol'
- 10 *Narcissus* 'February Gold'
- Trailing variegated ivy
- *Calocephalus* 'Silver Sand'
- 2 white *Cyclamen persicum*
- Pink ornamental cabbage

Style tip

Try adding contrast to dark foliage with a silvery dwarf Santolina (curry plant) or trailing *Helychrysum petiolare*

Choose a showstopper container and surround it with other contrasting pots for a vibrant display

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 Plant the hellebore near the centre and add daffodil bulbs, planting deeply, around edges. Place the ivy to trail over one side.



2 Place the silver-leaved *Calocephalus* 'Silver Sand' alongside a white *Cyclamen persicum* on the opposite side to the ivy.



3 Add the second white *Cyclamen persicum*. Make sure that the tips of the daffodil bulbs are still visible on the surface of the soil.



4 Lower the ornamental cabbage into the centre of the pot. This can be eventually replaced with other plants (see page 80).

Berried treasure

This antique copper pot has not been drilled with drainage holes because the narrow opening lets in little rain. The muted pot perfectly complements the rich colours and shiny evergreen leaves of the red-berried plants, *Skimmia japonica* and *Pyracantha coccinea* (firethorn), which has been trained up a bamboo frame placed at the back of the pot to add height and interest.

The main stems of the firethorn are attached with gardeners' stretch tape. This is a strong vinyl ribbon that expands as the plant grows. Firethorn berries, either in red or vibrant orange, are a favourite with birds.

The third berried shrub here is checkerberry or wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*), a dwarf shrub with smaller green leaves that spreads indefinitely and grows to just 15cm in height, making it a wonderful filler in winter pots. Ivy tumbles over the edge, while white cyclamen and heather create a sharp contrast that brings the display alive. Heather is also good for wildlife, being rich in nectar for bees to feast on before winter begins.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 1 *Pyracantha coccinea*
- 1 *Skimmia japonica* subsp. *reevesiana*
- 1 *Gaultheria procumbens*
- 1 white *Cyclamen hederifolium* 'Album'
- 1 white heather
- 1 trailing ivy

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 Add gravel to the bottom of the pot. Partly fill with compost, packing round the edges.



3 Add the ivy to trail over the edge of the pot. Plant the checkerberry and squeeze in white cyclamen.



2 Place the pyracantha frame at the back. Tease out the skimmia roots and pack soil round it.



4 Add the white heather to create a contrast between the skimmia berries and pyracantha.



Style tip

The frame adds height, balancing out the pear-shaped contours of the narrow-waisted copper pot

Pick plants that contrast well with the colour of your container. Before you start planting, wash out the inside of a repurposed container to ensure a healthy start

Delicate touch

Container planting is a brilliantly flexible method of gardening, giving you the opportunity to showcase eye-catching combinations of plants and flowers in miniature. And hanging baskets are an easy way to create displays that can be changed to ensure a succession of colour through the seasons. As one basket peaks, another is waiting in the wings to take its place.

This pretty basket should be planted in early winter, to be at its best some weeks later. Displayed at head-height, the gorgeous detailing on each bloom can be seen close up. Initially, the cyclamen and violas will bring the most colour, but as the winter goes on and only the silver-margined leaves remain, small bulbs will emerge. Among the loveliest are tiny reticulata irises, especially this fragrant variety *Iris reticulata* 'J S Dijt' which has reddish-purple flowers with delicate white and gold markings. By this time, the ornamental cabbage will have faded, but this doesn't matter because it still has its charm.

One potential problem is the delicate blooms being splattered with soil during heavy rain, so ensure that there is a good layer of dense foliage to protect the flowers.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **A 30cm wicker hanging basket**
- **A handful of gravel**
- **1 ornamental cabbage**
- **Cyclamen**
- **Winter-flowering violas**
- **10 *Iris reticulata* 'JS Dijt' bulbs**

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 **Pierce the plastic basket lining to create drainage holes, or add one if the basket isn't lined.**



3 **Set the cabbage in the centre. Plant the cyclamen and violas around it, leaving spaces between.**



2 **Add a layer of gravel to help drainage. Top with multi-purpose compost suitable for pot growing.**



4 **Use a dibber to insert the *Iris reticulata* bulbs in between the cyclamen and violas. Water well.**

Style tip

Transform a plain basket with a coat of outdoor paint, available in a variety of colours. Try the range by Cuprinol

Hang this display of delicate winter-flowering blooms at head height so it can be fully appreciated, and remember 'right plant, right place' for the best results

Rich purple shades

This lovely display uses plants which should be readily available at garden centres. Choose potted crocuses and miniature irises that are already in leaf or even have buds, ready to slot into containers. Drainage is key as dormant bulbs rot in cold waterlogged soil, so drill holes in any containers if necessary before filling the bottom with a 2cm layer of gravel. The larger the pot the better because not only does it make a great statement, but the more soil there is, the healthier the plants will be.

The focal point of this display is the hellebore. After flowering, it can be planted out in the garden where its leathery leaves will add body to the summer border. They cope in shade, although will flower better in a sunny spot.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 1 aluminium preserving pan
- 1 2-litre pot *Helleborus* 'Ivory Prince'
- 2 white heather *Erica* x *darleyensis* 'Springwood White'
- 2 purple heather *Erica* x *darleyensis* 'Kramer's Red'
- 2 pots of sprouting *Iris reticulata* 'JS Dijt'
- 2 pots of sprouting Dutch Crocus 'Jeanne D'Arc'
- 1 trailing ivy

A hellebore or Christmas rose is perfect as your centre piece. Choose from beautiful shades, ranging from pure white and mysterious green to rich plum and near black

Style tip

To create a pot that's best seen from every angle, place the tallest plant in the centre, surrounded by shorter ones

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 Fill the bottom of the pot with a 2cm layer of gravel to help drainage. Next fill the container with potting compost.



2 Carefully tease apart the roots of the hellebore to encourage growth and place it in the centre of the container.



3 Add the heathers, spacing them equally around the pot. Then plant the budding iris and crocus bulbs between the heathers.



4 Ensure there is a space left to one side for the trailing ivy. Plant it so that its foliage hangs delicately over the side of the container.

Three in one

As midwinter passes, the original centrepiece in your vintage copper container (page 76) may have begun to fade. However, you can give your display a quick facelift by exchanging the ornamental cabbage for a fresher plant. Try either an orange-berried *Solanum pseudocapsicum* (also known as Christmas cherry or Jerusalem cherry) or a young evergreen *Skimmia japonica* 'Rubella' (shown here in the main picture).

Solanum pseudocapsicum has vibrant orange berries that will provide weeks of colour during the winter, offset by shiny pointed leaves. Be aware, however, that the berries are poisonous. The dark-red buds of *Skimmia japonica* 'Rubella' last all through winter, before opening in spring to reveal fragrant pale flowers. Its eventual height and spread is around 1.5m, so remove it from your pot and plant it out in a border in the spring.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- A vintage copper pot, around 40x30cm
- Plants, as before, see page 76
- 1 *Skimmia japonica* 'Rubella'
- 1 *Solanum pseudocapsicum*, Christmas cherry
- 2 pink *Cyclamen hederifolium*
- 1 trailing ivy

Style tip

For a hot-coloured pot, stick to flowers in reds and pinks; or for a cooler look, choose a combination of silver and white

Check pots regularly to see if they need watering. Keep compost moist rather than alternating between saturation and dryness. Overwatering may cause root rot

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 By the mid winter, the ornamental cabbage may be past its best, so gently lift it out, taking care not to disturb the other plants.



2 Replace the cabbage with another plant, such as the orange-berried *Solanum pseudocapsicum*, adding more compost.



3 Alternatively, try a red-budded *Skimmia japonica* 'Rubella' as a contrast to white cyclamen and silvery *Calocephalus*.



4 For another variation, add pink *Cyclamen hederifolium* and a fresh pink ornamental cabbage for a vibrant winter display.

Singing the blues

Muscari (grape hyacinths) flourish in pots, provided the soil does not dry out, rewarding you with one intense-blue flower spike after another. During the summer, the container can be kept in a shady spot at the back of a border, until the autumn when the first thin leaves appear.

There are many beautiful varieties to choose from, including *Muscari* 'Big Smile' which certainly has that effect. Try 'Early Giant' or 'Blue Magic', which has heads of tiny, urn-shaped blue flowers rimmed with white. In a lighter shade, 'Peppermint' bears densely packed spikes of fragrant, pale-blue flowers that turn white towards the tip, while 'White Magic' flowerlets emerge from pale-green buds.

Mix your muscari with the periwinkle *Vinca minor*, which is a smaller version of *Vinca major*, a drought- and shade-tolerant shrub that spreads readily once settled. With its low-growing habit, it will hide the bulbs' dying leaves, distracting with pretty blue flowers from late winter. The variegated version with silver-edged leaves adds lightness on dark days.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **Metal tub, 30cm deep, 20cm wide and 40cm long**
- **1 *Vinca minor* 'Argenteovariegata' (periwinkle)**
- **20 grape hyacinth bulbs, *Muscari* 'Big Smile'**

Step-by-step POTTING UP



1 **Prepare your gravel, compost, bulbs and periwinkle ready for planting up.**



3 **Create 7cm-deep holes with a dibber and insert each muscari bulb, with roots downwards.**



2 **Add gravel to the bottom of the planter and fill with compost. Plant the periwinkle to one side.**



4 **If you've used a mix of bulbs, use wooden labels to remind you of which variety is which.**

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS NICOLA STOCKEN

Style tip

Plant your grape hyacinth densely to ensure the maximum impact from both flowers and foliage

With their vibrant-blue buds, muscari are a welcome addition to the winter garden. Remember to remove dying flower spikes to extend the flowering period

Potted BLUES

This flexible wall display can be planted to fit any available space you have on a wall or fence

A lot of focus is on beds and borders in larger gardens, but less so on the vertical spaces. In small plots, these add an invaluable extra dimension for growing plants. Just a cluster of terracotta pots filled with late-winter's finest flowers can transform a dreary wall or fence. Here's how…

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- **Terracotta pots**
- **Horizontal slatted fence panel**
- **A selection of compact late winter-flowering plants in 13cm plastic pots**
- **Horticultural gravel**
- **Compost suitable for containers**
- **S-shaped hanging hooks**
- **Ribbons or jute garden twine**



Iris 'Harmony', a reticulata variety in bloom from January



Viola 'Denim', an annual with fragrant flowers for months on end



1 Select your plants

At this time of year, there may be a limited selection of flowering plants at garden centres, but what beauties they are – fragrant irises, pretty wildflowers, perky primulas, silky squills, cool-coloured crocuses and dainty winter-flowering violas. Choose healthy plants, with moist soil and, in the case of bulbs, just peeping through the soil. Reticulata irises come in an array of blues and purples, splashed with golden veining. Crocuses open wide in sunshine, allowing bees to feed on the pollen within. Windflowers also open wide, trembling in the slightest breeze, while the blue bells of Siberian squills nod gently. Winter-flowering violas and primulas are resilient and long lasting if deadheaded,. Add variegated ivy for its light-green tones.

2 Prep your pots

A set of vintage terracotta pots (approximately 20cm high) are a good investment, lasting for years to nurture spring seeds, summer succulents, autumn's cuttings or winter's tiny bulbs. However, modern equivalents are readily available, and have the advantage of costing less, and coming with a lip to tie twine or ribbons beneath. Thoroughly wash any earth out of pots with warm soapy water, before sprinkling a little gravel in the base to aid drainage. Give an additional coat of preservative or a lick of exterior paint to the slatted panel to help it blend with existing woodwork or the wall.

3 Plant up

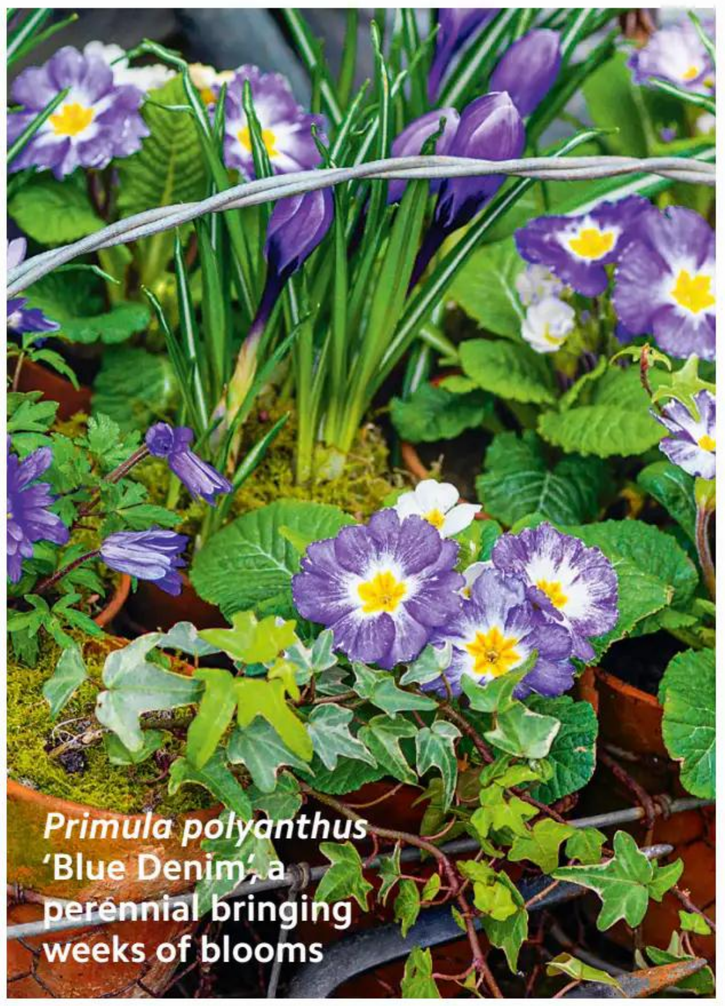
A few hours before planting, soak the plants – still in their plastic pots – in a basin of water. Cover the gravel in each terracotta pot with a 5cm depth of compost formulated for container planting: press down and water. Carefully inch each plant from its plastic container, taking care to keep the rootball intact, and position in the centre of the terracotta pot. Pack more compost down the sides and on the top, to within 1cm of the rim. Fill to the rim with sustainable moss or fine horticultural gravel, to prevent heavy rain landing directly onto the soil and muddying the flowers.

4 Add finishing touches

Arrange the S-shaped hooks on the slats, checking that they fit securely and can hold the weight of a planted pot. Cut a 50cm length of ribbon or twine, fold in half, and tie a knot in the folded end, to form a 3cm loop that hangs on the hook. Then take the ribbon or twine round each pot and tie in a double bow at the front – place a third of the way down pots without lips to ensure it cannot slip off.

Aftercare

Winter winds can be dehydrating, so check weekly that soil is damp to the touch. Once bulbs have finished flowering, water well and place in a sheltered, shady spot to allow foliage to die away naturally. Plant out in the garden, tucked safely beneath deciduous shrubs or trees, labelling clearly to prevent digging them up while they're dormant.



Primula polyanthus 'Blue Denim', a perennial bringing weeks of blooms



Windflower *Anemone blanda* 'Blue Star', a late-winter bulb



Crocus 'Blue Bird', a late winter-flowering crocus with welcome pollen for bees

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS NICOLA STOCKEN



Helleborus niger
HxS: 30x45cm
Also known as the Christmas rose, niger is an early-flowering hellebore, with bowl-shaped white blooms held above attractive leathery foliage. It flowers in January and February.

Care tip
Plant into well-drained soil with compost and mulch annually in spring



Erica x darleyensis 'Ghost Hills'
HxS: 50cmx1m
Winter heather is a real star during the colder months, putting up with all types of weather. Try the pink 'Ghost Hills', which is long-flowering, with blooms from January to May.

10 OF THE BEST *for winter containers*

Choose a mix of these varieties to create a stunning winter pot



Carex comans bronze-leaved
HxS: 20x30cm A low-maintenance, arching evergreen grass that looks lovely in mixed containers. The leaves have a reddish tint that goes well with red-toned foliage plants.



Winter-flowering pansies
HxS: 25x15cm Guaranteed to put a smile on anyone's face, these pretty flowers with their velvety petals will perk up a winter window box a treat. Choose from a huge range of colours.



Heuchera 'Plum Pudding'
HxS: 65x50cm Heucheras are versatile evergreen bedding plants with foliage in many colours. Choose an eye-catching one with extra oomph, such as 'Plum Pudding'.

Top tip
Plant with the Carex to bring out the reddish tones in its fronds



***Galanthus nivalis* H&S: 10cm**
Buy snowdrops in little pots in flower, to add to your container display. Once they've gone over, plant them in the garden, where their bright blooms will delight next winter.

Care tip
Plant in well-drained moist soil in dappled shade



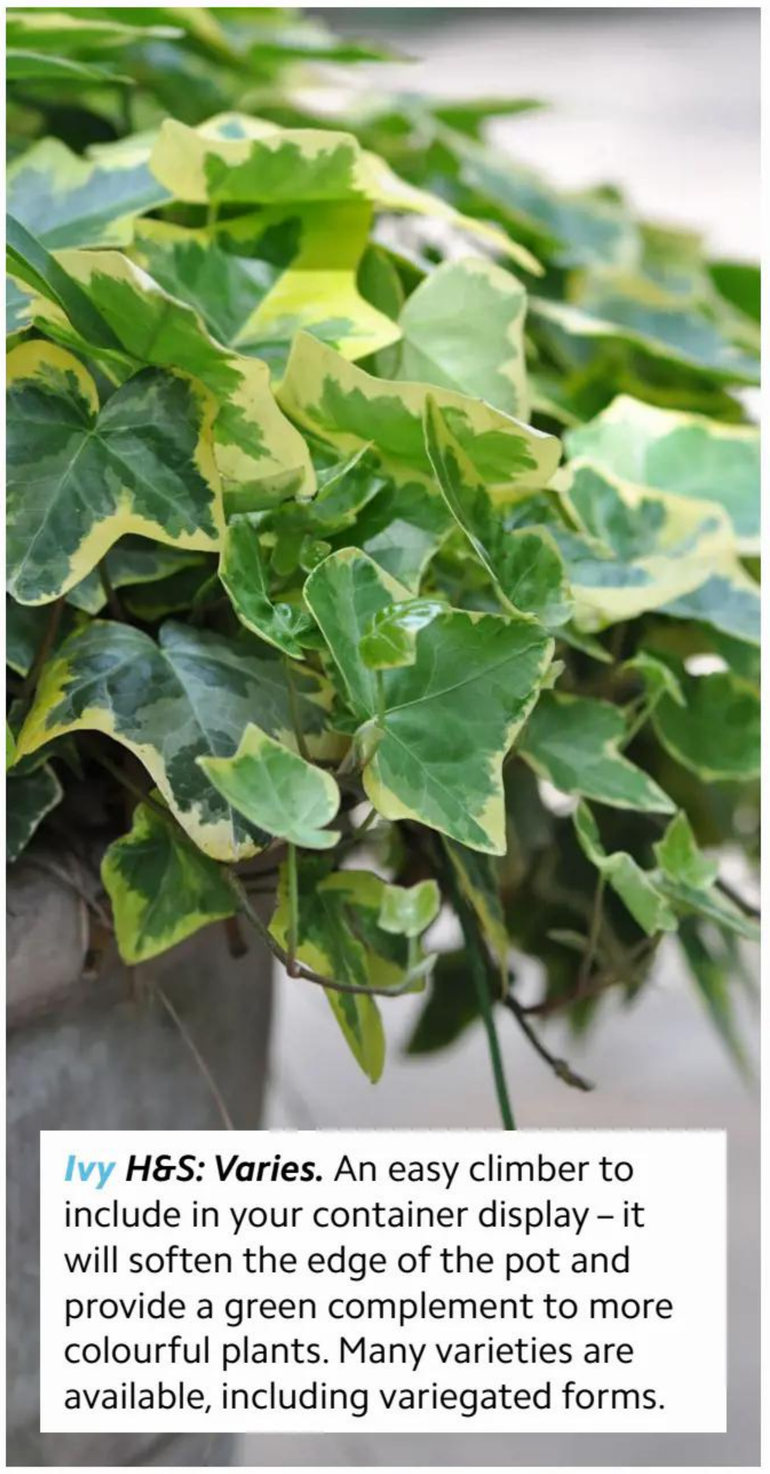
***Skimmia japonica 'Rubella'* H&S: 1.5m** The red flower buds on this skimmia last throughout winter, adding colour even before they open into scented white flowers in spring. Perfect for a terracotta pot on the patio.



***Soft shield fern* HxS: 1.2mx90cm**
Evergreen ferns like Polystichum setiferum look good all year and add textural interest with their lacy foliage. Easy to grow in pots, combine with hellebores or snowdrops.



***Cornus sanguinea 'Midwinter Fire'* H&S: 2m** Bringing unbeatable winter wow to your pots, the flaming red stems add height, too. Plant in borders once it has outgrown the pot. Produces white flowers in June.



***Ivy* H&S: Varies.** An easy climber to include in your container display – it will soften the edge of the pot and provide a green complement to more colourful plants. Many varieties are available, including variegated forms.

PHOTOGRAPHS ALAMY

GROW VEG *in* POTS

You don't need a huge garden to enjoy homegrown veg – discover how to grow a plentiful supply in pots

If you don't have a garden with a dedicated veg patch, growing vegetables in pots is a great alternative. Those with tiny outside spaces, paved-over gardens, balconies or even just a windowsill in the sun can turn their hopeful green thumbs towards growing edible plants in pots.

Growing crops in containers is accessible, flexible and as satisfying as growing into soil if you know how to give your plants what they need to grow and thrive. It's a great option for those who only have little pockets of outside space, rent their homes or aren't comfortable with kneeling down and would rather garden without bending over.

Although it's true that not everything will grow happily in a pot, there are benefits to container gardening. Your pot-dwelling crops will require more regular attention, which means spotting possible issues earlier than with plants in the ground. Also when you see an issue, like the appearance of a pest, it's easier to isolate the afflicted plant and intervene before the issue spreads.

Tips for success

1 **Water generously.** Plants in pots will take up all the water fairly quickly – especially in hot weather – so ensure they don't wither and die.

2 **Most multipurpose, peat-free compost contains enough nutrients for 1-2 months' growth.** From that point onwards, your plant will need to be fed. Liquid seaweed offers a wide spectrum of minerals and nutrients that are necessary for healthy plant growth, especially if you're growing crops that flower and fruit.

3 **Certain plants – tall ones in particular – will need additional support.** Peas appreciate knobbly twigs or nets to scramble up; tomatoes and peppers may need to be tied into a stake. If a plant becomes top heavy, put bricks or stones in the pot base to



Top tip

When it comes to position, consider the spread of plants when fully grown to ensure all plants get access to sunlight.

Challenges

Of course, there are challenges to overcome if you want your plants to flourish. Life in a pot means that plant roots won't be able to reach out deeper into the ground when they need more water and nutrients, so they'll rely on you.

Starting plants from seed requires a balance of good light and water to get them off to a strong start, so consider sourcing plugs from a garden centre or online supplier.

Some crops are simply too large for your average container garden – make sure the effort doesn't outweigh the reward.

BEST VEGETABLES TO GROW IN POTS



SALAD LEAVES

Sprinkle a salad seed mix over the soil and cover with 1cm of compost. Water with a fine spray so soil is not splashed up on the leaves. Snip a few leaves regularly.



POTATOES

Cover seed potatoes with 15cm compost, water well. Once foliage emerges, top with more compost; keep earthing up to 60cm. Harvest when foliage turns yellow.



CHILLIES

Stake large-fruited varieties and pinch out the main stem at 20-25cm to encourage branching. Dose the plants with general-purpose feed or diluted tomato feed with every third or fourth watering.



COURGETTES

Although easy to grow, courgettes need warmth, so pop seedlings on a sunny windowsill and plant out from the end of May. Protect from slugs and cover with cloches on cool nights. Keep plants well watered.



DWARF BEANS

Position sturdy canes or pea sticks in the container for the young plant to scramble upwards. Pick the pods regularly when they are young and tender.



OTHER VEG FOR POTS

Annual herbs such as parsley and basil.
Edible flowers like nasturtiums.
Dwarf tomatoes.
Chard and kale.

WORDS CLAIRE RATINON **PHOTOGRAPHS** ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM, GETTY IMAGES, NICOLA STOCKEN/GARDENPIX LTD

PAINT A TIERED *herb planter*

Revamp tired-looking timber with a bold paint treatment that will transform a plain planter into a unique and colourful piece

Wooden garden planters get faded and weather-worn after being outdoors in all seasons.

Painting with a quality exterior paint will add colour and protect wood from the elements, but why not have some fun too and create your own unique piece by using paint to create different patterns and effects on the planter?

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- **Paintbrushes**
- **Wooden vertical planter**
- **Painter's tape**
- **Protek Royal Exterior paint (assorted shades)**
- **Protek Royal Metallic paint in Copper**

1 Sort the base first. Paint the legs of your planter with two coats of paint in your chosen colour and allow to dry thoroughly.

2 Make diagonal shapes. Use painter's tape to mask off diagonal lines across each of the wooden troughs. Make sure the diagonal lines go in alternate directions on each of the trough's layers. Press the tape firmly against the wood to ensure the paint won't bleed through.

3 Apply the first two shades. Paint the top half of each trough using two coats of paint in a pale colour (we used Lime White and Pond Green) and allow the paint to dry thoroughly. Carefully remove the tape and reposition it over the edge of the layer you have just painted to ensure the two painted diagonals butt up together neatly. Press the tape down firmly to prevent bleed-through.

4 Choose a contrast colour. Next, paint the bottom half of each trough with two coats of paint in a darker contrast colour (we used Faded Terracotta). Allow the paint to dry thoroughly, but do not remove the tape just yet.

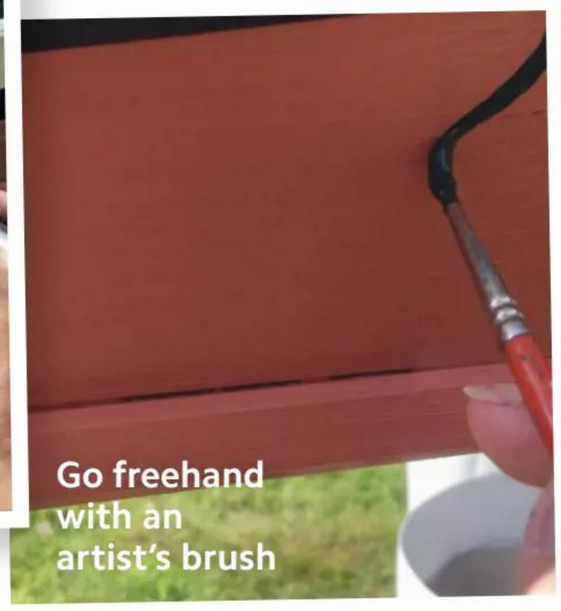
5 Paint leaf shapes . Use paint in contrast colours to create different patterns on each of the troughs. Try painting a simple abstract leaf shape in a darker shade of Forest Green (shown on the top trough) repeating it randomly.

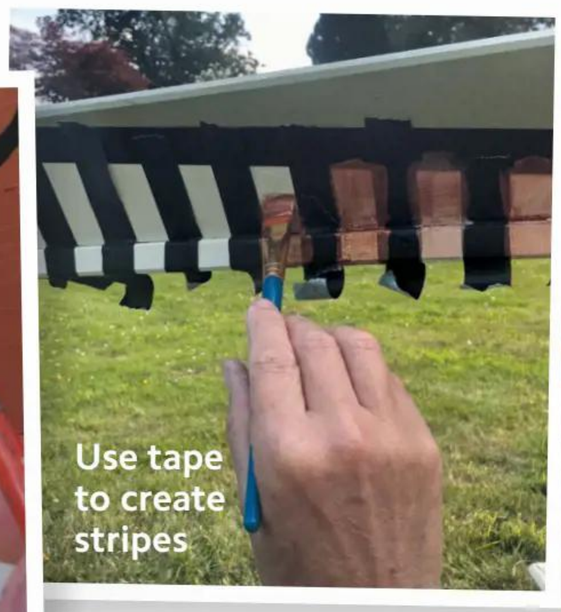
6 Add metallic stripes. Create painted stripes by applying lengths of tape vertically at regular intervals on top of a paler painted section. Use a flat artist's brush to apply two coats of copper metallic paint to the unmasked areas (to create the striped effect shown on the second trough). Allow paint to dry.

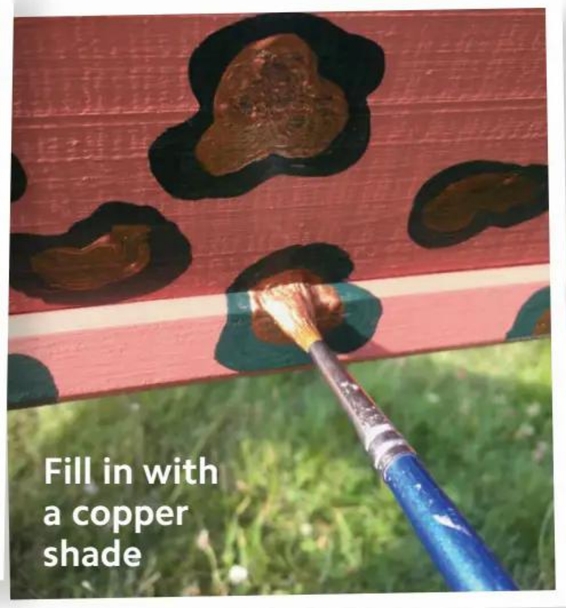
7 Create an animal print effect. Paint a fun leopard skin effect on another of the terracotta-painted sections. Use a small artist's brush to create the dark outline shape and once dry, paint inside the centre of each using copper metallic paint (shown on the third trough). Once all the painted areas are dry, carefully remove all of the tape from the different troughs and plant up with a selection of herbs.


Press the tape firmly in place


Paint two contrasting shades


Go freehand with an artist's brush


Use tape to create stripes


Fill in with a copper shade

FEATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHS PROTEK

Troughs in Lime White, Pond Green, Faded Terracotta, Forest Green Royal Exterior paint, all Protek

Top tip

You can pick up vertical planters like this at garden centres – the wooden ladder planter at B&Q is similar.

'Fill each trough with compost and then plant it up with your chosen herbs'

MAKE COLOURFUL

oil drum planters

Try an easy upcycling project and turn tatty old metal drums into a fun container garden


Start by cleaning the oil drums

Growing plants in containers is an easy way to brighten up an outdoor space, but large planters can be pricey, especially if you require a few. Cut costs by upcycling large containers such as steel oil drums or barrels after use with a coat of paint and a cheery design

Taller drums make brilliant raised planters that are perfect for growing herbs or summer vegetables in, or simply fill with colourful flowering plants to create an uplifting display.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- **Three clean oil drums**
- **Paintbrushes – one large, one flat artist's brush**
- **Base coat: Protek Royal Exterior paint in Stone Grey**
- **Protek Royal Exterior paint in a mix of colours**
- **Protek Royal Metallic paint in Silver**
- **Pencil**
- **Eraser**

1 Clean out the contents. Use empty oil drums for this project, with the top lids removed. Ensure that the inside of the drums has been thoroughly cleaned before you start (use warm soapy water and swish it around before disposing of it). Make sure that the metal has no sharp edges – sand smooth if necessary – then make a few drainage holes at the bottom of each drum using a hammer and nail.

2 Prep the surface. Before you start painting the exterior of the metal drums, give the outside a wipe over with an old rag and white spirit to ensure that the surface is clean and free from any grease and grime. Allow to dry thoroughly.

3 Apply a base coat. Start by painting the exterior of the drums with three coats of exterior paint – we used Stone Grey. Choose a paler shade for the base coat, which will allow the bolder top coat colour to pop more brightly. Allow the paint to dry thoroughly between each coat.

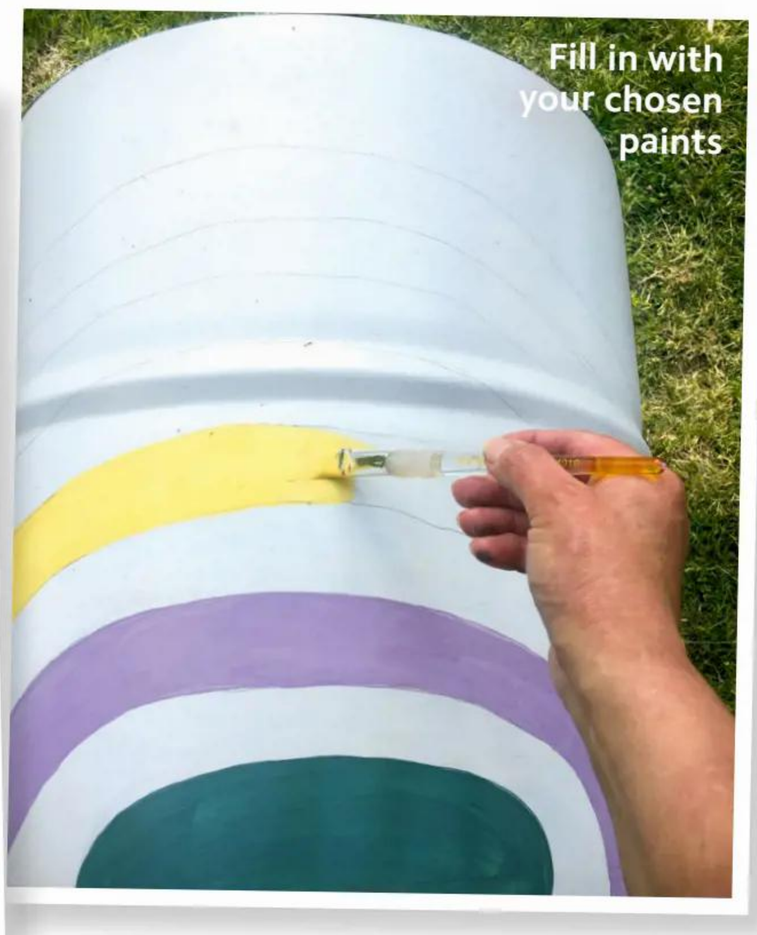
4 Sketch your design. Use a pencil to lightly draw arch shapes on the oil drums, working from the base of the drum upwards. Don't worry if they are not perfectly neat, they are just a guide and can be rubbed off once you've finished painting.

5 Fill in the colour. Using a flat artist's paintbrush, fill in the pencilled arches with your choice of colours, leaving a white band between each arch. Each coloured band will need two coats of paint, allowing time for it to dry between each coat. Once the paint is thoroughly dry, use an eraser to gently rub away any remaining pencil lines.

6 Plant up. Finally, fill the bottom third of each oil drum with gravel, crocks or broken up polystyrene chunks for drainage, then fill up with compost before adding your chosen plants. To save on compost (especially with bigger drums), try placing a large, rimmed tub trug inside the top of the drum. You can then just fill the tub with compost to plant your veggies in, rather than filling the entire drum up with compost and gravel.


Use a pale colour as a base coat


Get creative and pencil on your design


Fill in with your chosen paints

FEATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHS PROTEK

'Group containers together on the patio for easy plant-watering over the summer months'

Top tip

Create a mini vegetable garden with easy-to-grow crops, such as tomatoes, runner beans and carrots, or go for fast-growing salad leaves

Royal Exterior paint in: Stone Grey, Czar Plum, Passionate Plum, Mauveine, Porcelain Blue, French Lilac, Clouded Yellow, Guardsman Red, Quinky, Mariner Blue, Chalky Blue, Iris Blue, Somerset Blue, Lavender, all Protek



NEW IDEAS FOR

hanging baskets

These fresh looks reinvent the classic cottage garden accessory for contemporary spaces

Who doesn't love the drama of trailing plants? But, when you think of hanging baskets a vision of old plastic designs filled with gaudy plants probably springs to mind. Now, there's much more choice...

There are sleek metallic finishes in steel and zinc, which look on trend filled with green architectural foliage such as ferns and grasses or succulents. Different and unusual shapes and textures can also be found, including teardrop wire cages, glass planters and ribbed bowls. Or take inspiration from indoors and hang baskets in groups with different sizes and heights to create a jungle look that works well on patios and pergolas.

They also add impact to small areas like narrow balconies and courtyards, allowing you to max up your growing space. There are options for sunny or shady spots too, so it doesn't matter what the aspect of your garden is as there will be something to suit. It's also a great opportunity to grow your own. Grow specialist varieties of tumbling tomatoes that are perfect for the job, while strawberries love a basket too.

Take the indoors out

Trailing sedums look sensational if you let them holiday in the garden for the summer. They need very little water, making them a low-maintenance choice for styling up the patio. Trailing String of Pearls will do well in partial sunlight, away from the midday sun. Dependable echeveria is ideal for a sunny spot, while upright cactus varieties like crassula add a sculptural touch. These eye-catching glass containers are made from recycled glass and can be layered up with compost and gravel, then easily transferred indoors later on in the year.



Perk up a hot spot

If you're looking for ideas for a garden space that gets full sun, Mexican daisies (also known as fleabane) are a great choice. They thrive wherever you plant them but look particularly eye catching in a loose arrangement that spills out of hanging baskets. Another benefit of positioning it up high is that you won't miss the butterflies as they come seeking nectar from the flowers as the basket dances in the breeze. One pot of fleabane can be divided to create a pretty hanging basket display that lasts for months. Flowering from June to October, 'Profusion' is a trouble-free, dependable choice.
Hanging aged ribbed bowl, Crocus

Grow your own

If space is tight, growing produce in baskets is a great way of boosting your crop. But some are so pretty they tick the box of being ornamental too. Tumbling tomato varieties are the natural choice. Try an easy-to-grow heirloom variety like Hundreds and Thousands. These cascading plants will give bite-sized tomatoes all summer long. They don't need to be staked and you don't need to take out the side shoots either so they're faff free. Just put them in a sunny position and water regularly. Strawberry plants also work well in hanging baskets but the trick is to select plant varieties that produce small berries and are suited to the job.



Less is more

Choose one type of flower in a dramatic colour and let it shine as a solo performer. A trailing geranium or fuchsia in dark red works well, or try a verbena in a vibrant shade of pink. It will look good from May through to late autumn and doesn't need as much deadheading as some other trailing favourites. Try 'Superbena Burgundy'. It can be planted straight out into a basket in May (as long as there's no chance of frost). Use a compost especially designed for hanging baskets such as Westland Multi Purpose with John Innes and position in direct sunlight, feed once a month and it might even flower until Christmas.



WORDS SARAH WILON
PHOTOGRAPHS FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM

25 best BALCONY PLANTS

Choose easy to care for plants for a low-maintenance mini plant paradise

SUN-LOVING VARIETIES

1 LAVENDER

This drought- and wind-tolerant Mediterranean evergreen is a super balcony bloomer. Its aromatic silvery foliage is always a crowd pleaser, and a compact growing habit makes it perfect for planters and containers. English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) is the hardiest and has the longest lasting blooms. The French lavender *L.stoechas* is smaller and more tender, with fatter flowerheads. Use containers with drainage holes in the bottom and fill with a John Innes No3 compost. In autumn, clip back to an inch or so above where the foliage begins – this will keep plants bushy for the following season.

2 ZINNIA

These charming, vibrant half-hardy annuals are native to Mexico and easy to grow here. If you water and feed them regularly with tomato plant food they'll give you blooms from July to the first frosts. Buy large plug plants in June and they'll be ready for planting immediately into containers and window boxes. Shorter varieties will fare better on windy balconies. 'Queen Red Lime' (shown) has unusual red petals tipped with lime green and will reach 60cm, while 'Zahara Mixed' is shorter at 40cm and won't need staking.

3 JASMINE

This summer-flowering classic climber will fill your balcony with beautiful scent in the evenings. Jasmine is a hungry plant so use a rich compost, such as John Innes No3, and line the bottom of the container with newspaper to help to retain moisture and nutrients. Position the pot in a sheltered corner of your balcony and train the long tendrils along the balcony railings. Try the 'Devon Cream' variety, which has gorgeous cream-coloured flowers. Feed with tomato fertiliser monthly in summer.

4 PELARGONIUM

There's a reason why you'll see pelargoniums – commonly known as tender geraniums – on balconies and walls in countries such as Spain and Morocco. They cope well in hot, dry conditions, and they look stunning too! The scented foliage varieties give extra interest – 'Attar of Roses' is one of the best. Trailing types are great for window boxes, while upright varieties look good grouped with similar flower shades together. Water and feed pelargoniums regularly in summer, deadheading any spent blooms, and the plants will keep pumping out flowers until the end of autumn.

5 SANTOLINA

The pretty compact size and rounded habit of *Santolina chamaecyparissus* or cotton lavender makes it a good choice for pots and window boxes on balconies, where space is at a premium. Most varieties have aromatic, silvery foliage complemented by bright-yellow button flowers in summer, while *Santolina rosmarinfolia* offers mid-green foliage. In early spring, clip them back to where the new growth starts, and cut the faded flowerheads off in autumn. 'Pretty Carol' and 'Primrose Gem' are among the most attractive varieties.


2


3


4


5

BREEZE-FILTERING AND SCREENING CHOICES

6 PHORMIUM

Tough and undemanding, striking phormium plants (otherwise known as New Zealand flax) will tolerate a range of conditions. They instantly create a focal point on a balcony, especially if planted in taller pots so their graceful, arching leaves can be better admired. Remove any dead leaves in spring and add a sprinkling of slow-release fertiliser into the top layer of the compost. Keep well-watered in summer. Most are hardy but less so in pots – in winter move pots close to a sheltered wall if possible. Pot on into larger containers if they're starting to outgrow their current pot; they can be divided in spring, too. Choose compact varieties such as 'Maori Queen' and 'Jester'.

7 MAGNOLIA

These magnificent garden trees are slow-growing enough to plant in containers. *M. grandiflora* is a popular variety with garden designers for its large evergreen leaves, which are bronze-coloured on the underside. If you have enough space, plant a row of four or five magnolias in a trough or planter against the balustrade. The foliage that sits above the railing will help to reduce wind flow and provide a privacy screen. Try *Magnolia stellata* 'Susan', which has eye-catching deep-purple blooms in the spring and makes a nice focal point. Full sun to partial shade is best. Prune in April to keep them compact.

8 NANDINA DOMESTICA

This low-maintenance, multi-season plant really earns its place on a balcony, offering bronze-tinted leaves in spring, pretty, white flowers in summer and bright red berries and fiery foliage in the autumn. Commonly known as heavenly bamboo, it isn't a bamboo at all but has similar qualities, with narrow evergreen foliage on arching stems that rustle in the wind. It suits a modern-style balcony but also fits in nicely with a jungle theme. 'Firepower' is low-growing (45cm) and partners well with grasses, pines and evergreens. 'Obsessed' is a taller variety at 70cm, which is good for creating privacy. Use ericaceous compost and water regularly.

9 EUONYMUS

Robust and reliable, *Euonymus japonicus* 'Aureo-Marginata' (below) varieties are a safe choice for balcony gardens, while the upright 'Green Spire' looks stylish in wooden planters and has glossy green leaves all year round. It is fabulous planted with the bonfire-red foliage of *Nandina domestica* (8). It'll do a good job of filtering the wind on balustrade balconies, providing some shelter for other plants behind. *Euonymus planipes* has a graceful vase shape and stunning autumn leaf colour. This slow-growing shrub can be grown in a large container. Euonymus likes full sun but is tolerant of full or partial shade (H&S 50cm).

10 BAMBOO

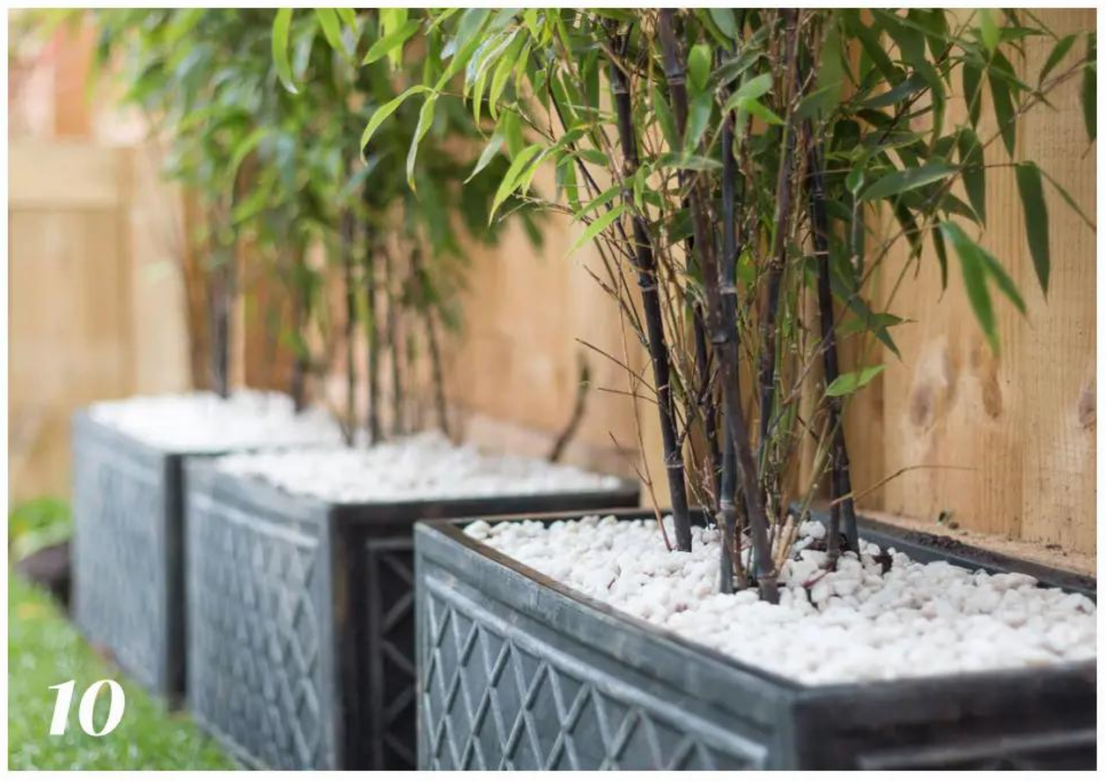
Known for its fantastic wind-filtering and screening abilities, bamboo is useful on a balcony. Having them in pots is a brilliant way to control their growth but choose clumping varieties, as these will expand less. A 40cm-wide pot is the smallest reasonable container size but be prepared to move the bamboo onto a bigger pot size or divide it every few years to keep it healthy. *Fargesia* 'Lava' and 'Simba' are compact enough for pots. Use a John Innes No3 compost and add slow-release fertiliser granules.

















WIND-TOLERANT

11 HEBE

Not only do the smaller-leaved hebes make excellent balcony plants, they're among the easiest to care for. Their tough, leathery leaves cope well with wind and drought, and they naturally look like they've been clipped meaning you don't have to bother getting the pruners out! Happily, they don't require much watering or feeding either – in fact feeding them will make the foliage too lush and floppy. *Hebe rakaiensis* has clusters of large white flowers in early summer (H&S 30x90cm), while 'Heartbreaker' has slender, variegated leaves that turn pink during winter (H&S 60cm).





12 CAMPANULA

These cottage garden favourites are tougher than they look, particularly the low-growing varieties like *Campanula carpatica*. They require little attention and will tolerate a lack of nutrients and water, as well as cope with partial shade. A relatively new compact variety is 'Porto'. It has neat foliage with petite purple flowers, and is great in small window boxes. It will flower on and off all spring and summer if well watered. *C. glomerata* has clusters of rich-purple blooms on stems that are 15-60cm tall. Cut back after flowering to prevent self-seeding and to encourage more blooms.

13 ARMERIA MARITIMA

Sea thrift grows on coastal clifftops, so it's a great option for windy balconies. Its low-growing, evergreen tufts add texture and structure all year round, and the cup-shaped pink or white flowers that emerge on long stems each spring make eye-catching displays. The flowers are rich in nectar and pollen and will attract bees. Grow as many as your space will allow for maximum impact, positioning them at the front of large container displays or to mingle with low-growing grasses. Add a crushed seashell mulch to help retain moisture and give a seaside vibe.

14 SUN-LOVING GRASSES

These low-maintenance plants offer textural contrast to mounded evergreens like lavender and santolina. For a coastal or contemporary look, try *Stipa tenuissima* (shown) with eryngium (sea holly) and *Oenothera lindheimeri* (19) around decking. *Miscanthus* 'Starlight' has elegant arching mid-green leaves and striking flower plumes that look good well into winter. In a raised planter, it would make a great windbreak. Blue oat grass (*Helictotrichon sempervirens*) looks lovely in silver pots with its steely-blue evergreen leaves and straw-coloured plumes.

15 DWARF PINES

These tough evergreens will add big personality to a sunny balcony without taking over. Unlike their full-sized versions, most dwarf varieties are slow-growing or reach a small size in maturity, making them perfect for growing in pots. They're super hardy too, coping with temperatures below -20C. *Pinus mugo* – or the dwarf mountain pine – has a compact rounded shape and is a good contrast for grasses, such as *Stipa* and *Miscanthus*. 'Winter Gold' has golden needles, great for brightening up a winter balcony, while 'Mops' has glossy dark-green needles. As with all long-term planting displays in pots, use a loam-based John Innes No3 compost.


16


17


18


19


20



SHADE FANS

16 ERYSIMUM 'BOWLES' MAUVE'

This wonderful wallflower produces elegant spikes of deep-mauve flowers above narrow grey-green leaves, from early spring until the end of summer. You can feed it with a high-potash fertiliser in summer to keep the flowers looking good, however it will cope with poorer soil. Trim plants lightly after flowering to help prevent legginess, and plants may need replacing after around four years. Wallflowers are sun-seekers but will tolerate some shade throughout the day, and will attract plenty of bees and other pollinators.

17 SHADE-LOVING GRASSES

Ornamental grasses add movement and texture and they're usually low maintenance, perfect for balconies. Most are sun-lovers but several varieties enjoy the shade. The hardy Japanese forest grass *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' (above) forms cascading mounds of narrow bright-green or yellow leaves. Its minimalist style makes it a good focal point in a tall pot, or with one or two other foliage plants in a minimalist scheme (H&S 35x40cm). Meanwhile, *Carex oshimensis* grass comes in various shades, from buff brown and cream variegated to golden green, and will tolerate drier conditions. *Anemanthele lessoniana* is less hardy but is a fantastic statement grass for a balcony with arching foliage that is tinted reddish orange in spring and summer. It does well in sun or shade.

18 BEGONIA

With their showy leaves and flowers, begonias bring a jungly, exotic look to a balcony. Most grow best in part shade so they're perfect if your balcony only gets sun for half the day, but they will tolerate full shade, too. There are several different types of begonias. Houseplant begonias are enjoyed for their striking foliage and can be moved onto a balcony during the summer. Outdoor begonias come with flamboyant long-lasting flowers and can be grown in planters from June and discarded when winter comes. Keep compost moist and water at the base where possible to avoid fungal disease appearing on the lower leaves. There are many species to choose from – a good one for beginners is *Begonia semperflorens*. If you're feeling adventurous, *B. grandis* subsp. *evansiana* var. *alba* is a stunner.

19 OENOTHERA LINDHEIMERI

When they're swaying in the breeze, the starry white or pink flowers carried on willowy stems look like a flight of butterflies. These late-summer flowering perennials are great for filling in gaps and partner well with grasses. Enjoy the red-tinted foliage through winter, then cut stems back to the ground in February/March. Replace plants every three years to keep the display looking healthy. They prefer a warm, sunny position but will tolerate some shade. 'Whirling Butterfly' is a short variety.

20 HERBS

Compact perennial herbs like oregano 'Compactum', thyme 'Silver Posie' (shown) and *Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Prostratus' are excellent on balconies as they cope with heat and drought – and smell good too. Bees love the flowers and regular trimming of the soft stems will keep plants bushy as well as give you herbs for cooking. Perennial herbs can be cut right down to the ground in May to rejuvenate them. If your plot is in semi shade try mint instead (there are lots of exciting varieties to choose from). Check individual labels for height and spread.

21 HARDY FERNS

These plants have a striking, architectural quality, which makes them good enough to grow on their own. They're perfect if you prefer the minimalist look or don't want to spend too long tending lots of different plants. Put them in



taller pots so that you can better admire their graceful, arching fronds. They don't have a very deep root run though, so you can stuff the bottom of the pot with broken up bits of polystyrene to reduce the weight of the compost. *Dryopteris* varieties cope well with drought conditions so do well in pots. *D. erythrosora* (shown) has lovely bronze fronds in spring deepening to green in summer. *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Runaway Bride' makes an excellent partner in a neighbouring pot.



22 NASTURTIUM

These half-hardy plants are among the quickest and easiest annuals to grow. Sow the seeds into multipurpose compost outdoors on a balcony from mid-May, when all risk of frost has passed. If you want to skip the seed sowing, buy large plug plants instead. Trailing types can cascade over your balcony while bushy varieties like 'Baby Deep Rose' can go at the front of pots. The flowers are edible and make wonderful cake decorations. Water well while they are establishing and feed every two to three weeks with a high-potash fertiliser.

23 ACER

Japanese maples are ideal for pots as they are slow growing and make stunning focal points. They come in dozens of beautiful colours and leaf shapes. 'Going Green' has luminous green leaves in spring and summer, turning lovely shades in autumn. They're hardy but do best in a sheltered spot. Get them off to a good start by creating your own potting mix using equal measure of John Innes No3, ericaceous (acidic) compost and sharp sand for drainage. They like their roots quite shallow, so plant the rootball just slightly proud of the top of the compost. Feed acers in spring and summer with a slow-release fertiliser or liquid feed. Keep the compost moist but not soaking wet.

24 SALAD LEAVES

If there's a shady nook on your balcony, why not grow your own salad? Lettuces, mustard leaf, radish, spring onions and spinach prefer a cooler environment away from direct sunshine, and they won't be bothered by slugs high up. Choose window boxes or pots that are at least 15-20cm deep so plants can develop a decent root system. Make sure there are drainage holes. Put a drip tray underneath and water at the bottom. Use John Innes No2 compost. For baby leaves, plant the seeds 5-10cm apart, and for whole lettuce heads like 'Little Gem', plant 25cm apart. Leaves will be ready to harvest in six to eight weeks.

25 DAISIES

Not only are they good looking, daisies are happy in sunny, dry and windy conditions. They're also a magnet for bees and butterflies. On a balcony, naturally low-growing varieties like osteospermum and gazania are great, but taller shasta daisies (*Leucanthemum* x *superbum*) have strong flexible stems and will cope with windy conditions. Brachyscome 'Blue and white mix' has a great froth of blue and white daisy flowers all summer long and looks good with other summer bedding plants like geraniums and calibrachoa. Erigeron is another hazy daisy flower, with pink and white flowers all through the summer.









WORDS SALLY JENNER **PHOTOGRAPHS** GETTY IMAGES, ALAMY, PELARGONIUMS FOR EUROPE

Cool & contemporary
CONTAINERS

These on-trend planters in shades of grey are just the thing to take you right through the colder months and into spring

Whatever your style, choosing what to plant up in autumn containers lets you get creative and brings a much-needed pop of colour to gardens at this time of year. Many of the latest pots and planters are made of durable ribbed metal, smooth concrete and stippled clay, and come in every shade of grey from dark slate to pale dove. As summer bedding fades, pack them with a selection of plants that offer a long-lasting display right through autumn and winter, preferably ones that are low maintenance too. Be sure to position your planters where you can see them for maximum impact. Just remember to regularly feed, water and deadhead flowers to keep them going until spring.



Tier your pots

Sticking to a limited colour palette will bring a cool and contemporary look to a multi-container display. Colour interest can be introduced with the variegated leaves of *Tradescantia* and purplish buds of hebes. When it comes to blooms opt for those with dense foliage to really pack out your pot. Try campanula which will provide just such foliage as well as copious white flowers throughout summer and into autumn. Trough planters are also great for defining an area at the edge of a patio or lining a path. You could even add solar uplighters to enhance the display even more.
Galvanised ribbed trough planters, Vincent and Barn

Large pots for small trees

Go for galvanised

◀ Pots look great grouped together and it's an even bigger win if they're a matching set. Galvanised metal planters are on trend this winter and look good, whether you're going for a cool urban look or something more traditional. Plus, as galvanised metal weathers over time, it will look like it's been there forever. Plant up with a dwarf weeping willow tree (rootsplants.co.uk) that's ideal for small gardens and come spring you'll have a profusion of pussy willows.
Galvanised Ollam planters, (large H27xW30cm; medium H23xW23cm; small H20xW18cm), Vincent and Barn

Style up a trough

Wood that has been dipped and treated is a practical and pleasing addition to your garden when it comes to autumn and winter planting. Even better if the container is a trough-style one on legs to lift plants away from freezing or waterlogged ground to protect the roots. And if you're planning on growing your own all year round a trough is perfect for winter veg, and it will look equally good planted up with shrubs or winter flowers such as hellebores.
Latchmere trough in treated spruce (H54xW91cm), Garden Trading

Select an all-weather design

Just because summer's over it doesn't mean you have to pack up the rattan. Look for high quality all-weather rattan weave styles with drainage holes that can be left outside year round. Pink planting in a slate grey container is a classic combo that works every time – choose a mix of pink flowering cyclamen to add a colour pop on gloomy days. Alternatively pack your planter with tall grasses or bamboos so they work as a screen to add shelter and privacy to your seating area.
Windsor Bronze rectangular planter (H42xW68cm), Bridgman

Choose texture for interest



Opt for evergreens

Buy an off the shelf long-performing pot collection and you are guaranteed to get stunning results all through winter. Choose two-tone purple *Viola* 'Beaconsfield', *Ajuga reptans* 'Chocolate Chip' and an evergreen fern *Polystichum tsussimense*, which perform well in sun or dappled shade. Keep moist until established and deadhead regularly. Partner with a ribbed zinc bowl for maximum impact.
Evergreen compact container collection, Sarah Raven





Coordinated style

A collection of stylish box (*Buxus*) plants will introduce a swish detail to your porch. Add your own touch by training your box plants into pyramids or balls. Box is happy to be trimmed into neat shapes and this makes it one of the most popular topiary plants around. It's also easy to care for as it's so low maintenance, and it doesn't mind a shady spot either. A bonus is that bees and butterflies love this classic shrub. Position your pots against a backdrop of colour and the geometric shapes will really pop.

Buxus bundle of three plants: ball W23xH45cm; tree W26xH55cm; pyramid W27xH80cm, Beards & Daisies

Choose a timeless look

The shape of your pot is everything when it comes to what it can add to your space as a design feature. The gentle curves of handsome Mediterranean-style pots and urns introduce a timeless touch that never dates, especially when made of a material with an aged patina to give it a rustic quality. For autumn and winter planting always choose weatherproof pots that will withstand frost and extremes of temperature, such as the latest clay products. Not only are they tough but they also catch the eye. Plant up with winter-flowering pansies in a variety of shades and silver foliage to add a touch of complementary colour that will last for months.

Ancient Collection pot bowl, W18xH14cm (also available in three larger sizes), Gardenesque



WORDS SARAH WILSON **PHOTOGRAPHS** (SARAH RAVEN) JONATHAN BUCKLEY

25 best PATIO PLANTS

These top performers will keep your outside space looking fabulous every month of the year

1 TREE FERNS

These beauties, like *Dicksonia antarctica* (left), will add drama to any garden. They can be grown in the ground or in pots but to thrive, they require a damp, semi-shaded spot in rich soil. Coastal areas, where the atmosphere is naturally humid, often make ideal habitats. They grow slowly, up to 4m, so it's worth buying the biggest specimen your budget will allow. Plant the trunk 15cm deep, staking taller specimens. Water liberally up and down the trunk during the growing months of May to October. If tree ferns dry out, the trunk shrinks and the fronds become stunted.

2 ALSTROEMERIA

Dark red, orange and purple varieties look great with bold foliage plants like colocasia and cordylines, while pastel and pale varieties combine well with agapanthus. The attractive dark flecks on their petals guide bees down into the nectar-rich centres. They grow rampantly in garden borders, but it's much easier to manage them in containers, provided you choose low-growing varieties. When deadheading, pull flower stems from the base as this will stimulate new growth.

3 OLIVE TREES

The silvery grey-green foliage of this Mediterranean classic instantly gives your patio a holiday vibe, especially when partnered up with pink pelargoniums (16). Olive trees are easy to grow in pots or in the ground provided the soil is free-draining. They come in a range of sizes, from lollipop standards to mature trees with gnarled trunks. Position in a sunny spot, preferably sheltered and away from cold, drying winds. Insulate the inside of the pot with bubble wrap before you add the compost – saving you the hassle of wrapping the pot in winter (olive trees won't tolerate frozen roots). Don't let the compost dry out in summer, and apply a liquid seaweed feed fortnightly in summer to keep them looking healthy. Regular pruning in spring will help them keep their shape.

4 COLEUS

Coleus, also known as solenostemon, are grown for their velvety foliage that comes in psychedelic combinations of lime green, bright red, yellows, pink, brown and bronze. They're ideal for a jungle-style planting scheme teamed up with marigolds and colocasia. A vertical hanging pocket planter filled with coleus makes a bold display. They're frost-tender so are treated like annuals in cooler regions, planted outside in June and discarded or brought indoors in autumn. They make lovely houseplants, so it's possible to keep them from year to year. Take softwood cuttings in summer to make more plants.

5 TULIPS IN POTS

Coming in every colour imaginable, tulips provide much-needed pops of colour after early-spring flowers have faded and summer ones have yet to appear. Planting them in pots couldn't be easier – half fill large containers with John Innes No2 compost, pop the bulbs in, spaced 5cm apart with the pointed end upright, then cover them with more compost so that they are about 15cm below the top of the compost. The ideal planting time for tulips is November, before the ground freezes. You can leave planters outside all year, provided the compost doesn't get too wet.


2


3


4


5

6 HYDRANGEA

This fantastic group of plants brings structure, colour and seasonal interest to any planting scheme. Their long-lasting blooms appear from around July and carry on putting on a great show until autumn. Some of them, like 'Wim's Red', have flowers that get better as they age, turning faded shades of pink and red. The mophead hydrangeas (*H. macrophylla*) are a crowd pleaser with their large, rounded blooms. Some of the plants can reach 2m in height. Wait until spring to cut the flowerheads off, down to the nearest emerging buds.

7 FRUIT FOR THE PATIO

The flavour of home-grown fruit – sun-warmed and perfectly ripe – is far superior to supermarket produce that's been artificially ripened. Thanks to expert breeders, there are plenty of dwarf fruiting varieties that thrive in containers. For the best results, choose self-pollinating, hardy varieties on dwarfing rootstocks such as apple 'Red Falstaff', pear 'Concorde' and plum 'Jubilee', and cherry 'Sunburst' (shown). Position pots in a sunny spot, and try to give plants some protection from the wind, otherwise you'll be forever picking up fallen pots.

8 *HELIOTROPE ARBORESCENS*

The cherry pie plant has delicious cherry vanilla-scented purple blooms and attractive dark-green pleated leaves. Garden centres and online suppliers usually have them as small plants from May. Plants can get straggly over time so they're best grown as an annual, but you can make more plants for free by taking cuttings in summer. If you keep the compost moist and regularly feed with a high-potash fertiliser, these gorgeous plants will reward you with a beautiful display from June to October. The purple 'Chatsworth' (shown) and rich-blue 'Midnight Sky' are excellent varieties.

9 EUCOMIS

The pineapple lily is one of the best summer flowering bulbs, offering tropical-looking flower spires with tufty tops that are reminiscent of the pineapple, hence its common name. Despite its exotic good looks, eucomis is fairly easy to grow in a wide range of climate zones. If you wait until the end of April to early May, the bulbs can be planted directly into pots of compost outdoors. Low-growing types, such as *Eucomis aloha* and *E. bicolor*, are great for shallow planters and the front of borders, while the showstopper *E. pole-evansii* can reach a whopping 1.5m high. Keep plants well-watered and give a liquid feed fortnightly during the growing season. In containers, bulbs are more vulnerable to frost damage so it is best to err on the side of caution and move pots into a cold shed over winter.

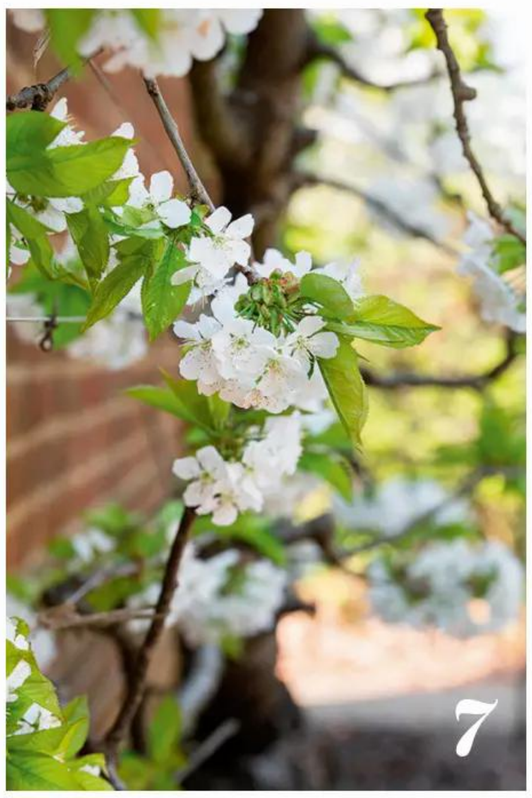
10 CALIBRACHOA

This popular bedding plant, also known as million bells, comes in a wide range of shades from warm oranges and peaches to pretty pinks and purples, to bright yellow stripes. It's a fast-grower and will be smothered with mini petunia-like flowers from summer until the first frosts. Apply a liquid feed fortnightly and make sure the compost doesn't get overly dry. Because of its trailing habit, calibrachoa works well in hanging baskets or tall planters. 'Rave Pink' is an eye-catching variety with yellow stripes on bright pink petals.

11 BAMBOO

These popular architectural plants are ideal for screening and privacy on a patio. If you grow them in containers, the roots of bamboo are restricted, so there's no need to worry about them taking over your garden. A planter set on wheels is a good idea so that you can easily move your portable


6


7


8


9


10


11


12

12 BAY TREES

Clipped standard bay trees (*Laurus nobilis*) shaped into lollipops, cones and spirals instantly smarten up a patio area, and their glossy green leaves look good all year round. For a more informal look, buy them as young plants and let them grow into their natural bushy habit. Prune them lightly every spring to help keep them compact. They're fairly indestructible, so if you forget to water them regularly, they'll probably survive. They are slightly tender, especially when grown in containers, so in colder regions move them to a frost-free place when temperatures dip below -5C or cover plants in a horticultural fleece 'jacket'. Aim to re-pot your bay tree every two to three years. The fragrant leaves can be used in cooking, fresh or dried, to give an aromatic flavour to soups and stews.


13

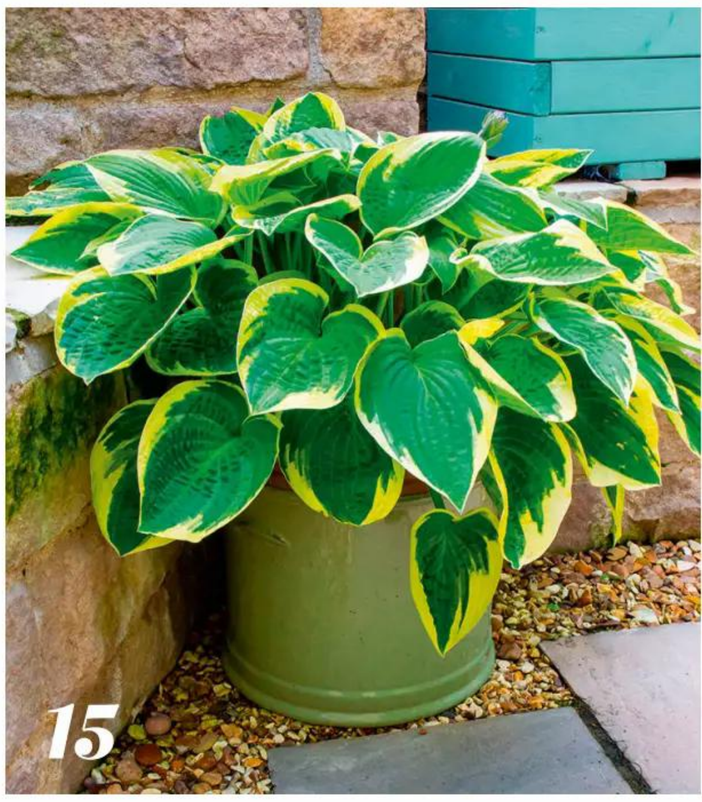
13 BEE-FRIENDLY PLANTS

Bees can see yellow, purple, blue and white more clearly than any other colour, so be sure to include plenty of flowers in these shades. Early spring-flowering crocus and *Clematis cirrhosa* 'Freckles', which flowers over winter, both provide a great start for the queen bees emerging from hibernation, while the wallflower *Erysimum* 'Bowles Mauve' (shown) offers nectar-laden flowers from spring to autumn. Thyme and chive flowers please the bees in early summer, while patio buddleias and pots of lavender will help them load up with nectar towards the end of summer.


14

14 SMALL TREES

Trees add height, privacy, shade and interest. Where patio space is limited, growing trees in containers is a great option. With their roots restricted, they won't reach their full height and spread, and there's always the option to root-prune to keep their size in check. Varieties that look good over several seasons, with flowers, attractive bark and autumn colour, are invaluable. *Amelanchier lamarckii* has lovely spring blossom and excellent autumn colour, *Acer* 'Crimson Queen' will hold its red leaf colour from spring to autumn, and *Cotoneaster* 'Pendulus Hybridus' (shown) has long, weeping branches of neat evergreen leaves, and red berries in autumn. When planting in containers, choose the biggest container you can and fill with John Innes No3 compost, which is the best for long-term plantings.


15

15 HOSTAS

With their attention-grabbing foliage, hostas (or plantain lily) make great accents in the borders, but they make an even bigger statement in pots on a patio. They thrive in the shade and there are thousands of varieties to choose from. They come in a wide range of shades, with leaves from blue, green and variegated to gold and yellow, so there'll be one to suit all tastes and styles. Hostas have roots that are wider than they are long, so ideally choose a pot that is wider than it is deep. That said, they can look very elegant in tall, narrow pots, you just may have to divide the rootballs regularly.

screen around. You'll need to root-prune your bamboo every three to four years, otherwise the roots will push through the pot as they grow. Choose low, sturdy metal or wood planters that are rectangular-shaped so it's easier to pull out the rootball for pruning. *Fargesia* varieties work well as they are clump-forming not spreading, plus they're among the hardiest.

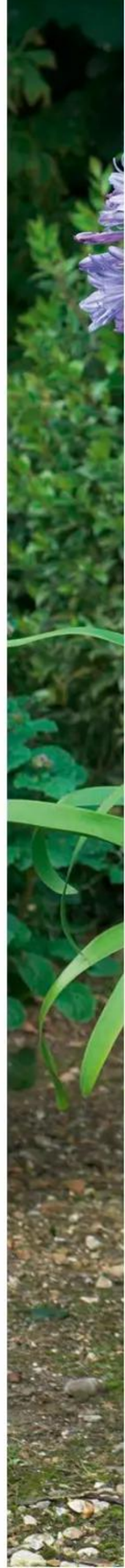

16


17


19


18


20



16 PELARGONIUM

These South African beauties offer excellent value, flowering from early summer right through to the first frost. If you want to get serious about pelargoniums, there are specialist nurseries offering fancy varieties, but the zonal pelargoniums found at garden centres in shades of pink, red and white, are great for adding colour in window boxes and containers. They don't take a lot of looking after either – an application of slow-release fertiliser in the spring and occasional watering and deadheading is all they need. If you want to keep plants going for the following year and live in a colder zone, simply move the plants indoors – they're great for brightening up a south-facing windowsill over winter.

17 HERBS

Many garden herbs come from the Mediterranean where they enjoy free-draining soil, which is why they do so well in containers where the soil can dry out quicker. Grow them in tubs and pots by the back door where it is convenient to snip off stems for cooking. The perennial herbs that are easiest to grow include sage, chives, thyme and mint. *Salvia rosmarinus* Prostratus Group (shown) is a must-have for its gorgeous trailing habit, good for softening the edges of raised planters. Sorrel is a lesser-known but easy-to-grow herb with a lemony bite that's great with eggs and salmon. Basil is a summer staple but it fares better on a sunny windowsill or in a greenhouse where its delicate leaves can be protected from the weather.

18 BRUGMANSIA

The huge trumpet-like flowers of this tropical South American beauty will stop you in your tracks. Coming in shades of pink, white, yellow and red, the out-sized blooms can reach 30cm long. Brugmansia won't tolerate temperatures much below 7C, so in cool regions it's best grown in a large pot and moved indoors in autumn – a conservatory is ideal. Prune in late summer to keep the plant to a manageable size, cutting stems back to 2.5cm above old wood – wear gloves as the sap will irritate the skin. Feed with a high-potash fertiliser like liquid seaweed in summer.

19 GRASSES

Ornamental grasses add style to patios big or small, and they provide interest virtually all year round. The trick to growing them well is to choose the right variety for your space. There are plenty of varieties that will thrive in containers: *Pennisetum advena* 'Rubrum' is a fabulous plant when used in combination with pretty calibrachoa (10). The grass *Hakonechloa macra*, with its graceful waterfall-like foliage, makes a statement in tall pots. In the borders adjacent to a patio, try a group of *Calamagrostis* 'Karl Foerster', which creates an elegant feathery screen, or the bronze-red *Anemanthele lessoniana*.

20 HARDY SUCCULENTS

Fleshy-leaved plants, such as agave and sedum, have an architectural presence, adding texture and colour to a patio. Many can handle cold temperatures, but they won't put up with prolonged wet conditions. Ensure you use a sandy, gritty compost mix and let the compost dry out between waterings. In wetter climates, move pots indoors over winter. Echeveria (shown) and agave make striking focal points, and stonecrop (sedum) are good for trailing displays. Sempervivum is super easy to care for, while upright aeoniums are great for creating eye-catching accents, but they'll need protecting from frost.

21 DAHLIAS

These popular plants are a must-have for the style-conscious gardener. If you grow them from tubers in spring, you'll have a much wider range to choose from, but if you've missed the early planting window, garden centres will sell pre-grown plants from early summer. Dahlias come in a wonderful range of flower shapes and shades, from cute

orange pom-poms and vibrant pink cactus types, to demure single flowers like 'Wishes and Dreams'. Those over 60cm tall will need staking, so choose shorter varieties for patio containers. Dahlias are hungry, thirsty plants – give them a dilute tomato feed every week between June and September. Move pots somewhere frost-free over winter.


21


22

22 AGAPANTHUS

These fabulous summer perennials have firework flowerheads in shades of blue, purple or white on tall stems – they're like the alliums of summer. Despite their exotic good looks, they're low maintenance and once you've started growing them, you may find yourself with a mild addiction. Because they cope well with drought and like their roots restricted, they're perfect for containers. Feed them with rose fertiliser in spring and summer or give a liquid feed fortnightly during the growing season. Evergreen varieties are less hardy than deciduous types and need to be moved indoors to a greenhouse or conservatory in autumn to protect the roots from frost.

23 TRAILING BEGONIAS

Some people regard tender begonias as rather old fashioned but stroll around the smart streets of Mayfair and Chelsea in summer and you'll notice lots of them in gorgeous window boxes. The trailing types are more elegant than upright varieties and if you position plants high up – in hanging baskets or tall pots – their pendulous flowers can be better appreciated. 'Pendula White' has pink-tinged hanging white flowers and looks lovely planted with contrasting *Heuchera* 'Ginger Snap'. If you want a more exotic-looking scheme, try the trailing *Begonia* 'Apricot Sparkle' (shown).


23

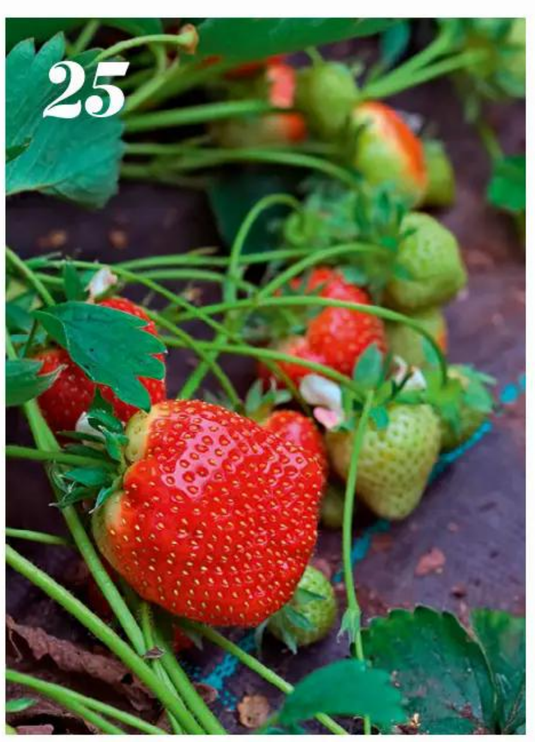

24

24 ROSES

If you thought that roses were only for large gardens and borders, think again. Plenty of rose varieties are suitable for growing on a patio, either in large containers or as climbers up a house wall or over a pergola. Warmer, south-facing patios will absorb the sun's rays and bring out the heady scent, and on a patio, you can enjoy their beauty and perfume close up. Top rose choices for pots include 'Gabriel Oak', with its deep pink, highly fragrant blooms, and 'Desdemona' (shown) for its pale peachy pink blooms that have a gorgeous scent. 'Wollerton Old Hall' has pale apricot blooms and looks lovely trained over a pergola, while compact 'Strawberry Hill' is great in a trellis planter.

25 PATIO STRAWBERRIES

Growing strawberries in pots, tubs, hanging baskets and grow bags is a great way to enjoy these tasty fruits in a small space. Only plant three to four plants per 40cm diameter pot – the more room the roots have, the happier the plants will be, and the more strawberries for you to pick. Snip off any baby plants that are produced in the summer (potting these on if you wish to) and try to shade the pot as plants will be unhappy if their roots get too hot in the sun. Keep them regularly watered and fed with a fortnightly seaweed from April to September. 'Cambridge Vigour' is an excellent variety and 'Symphony' (shown) is good for more northern, damp areas. The plants die back in winter and will start sprouting fresh new leaves in the spring.


25

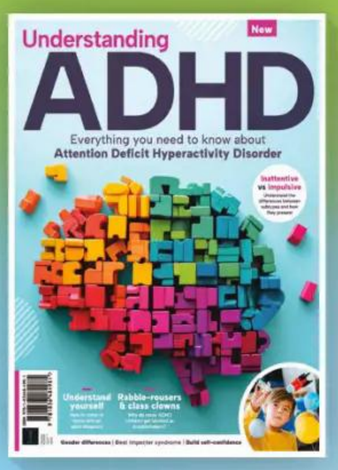
WORDS SALLY JENNER **PHOTOGRAPHS** GETTY IMAGES, ALAMY, FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM



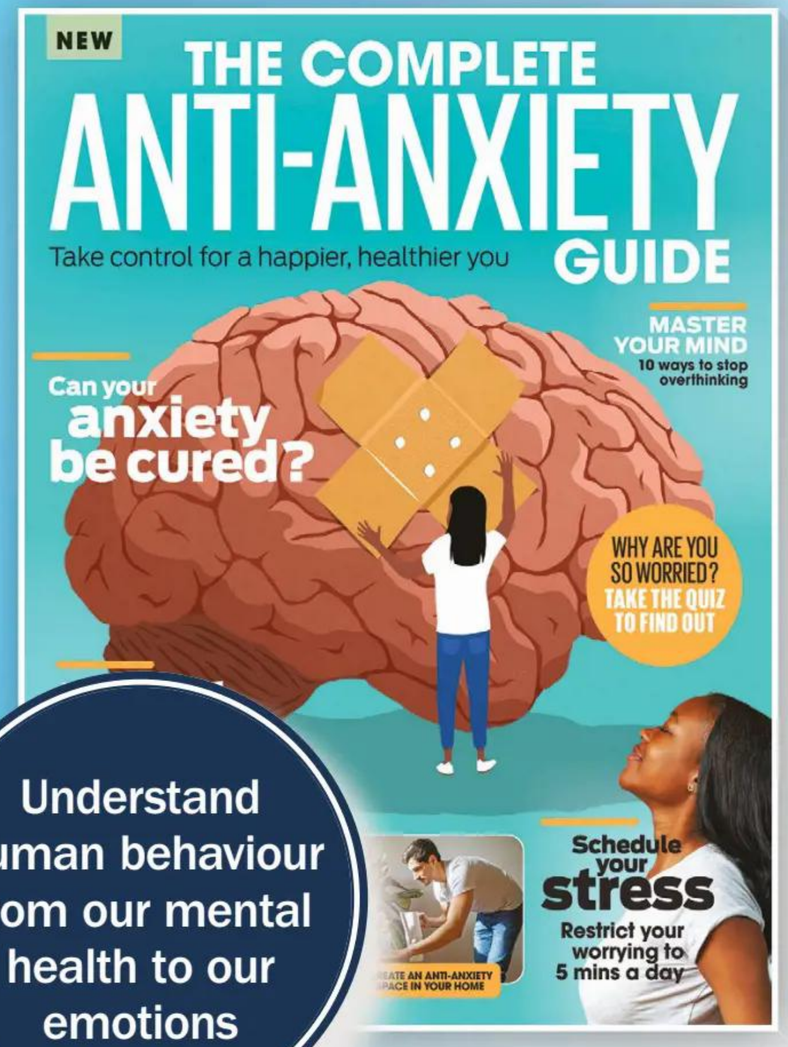
Discover adventures of a lifetime with our inspiring travel books

















Understand human behaviour from our mental health to our emotions





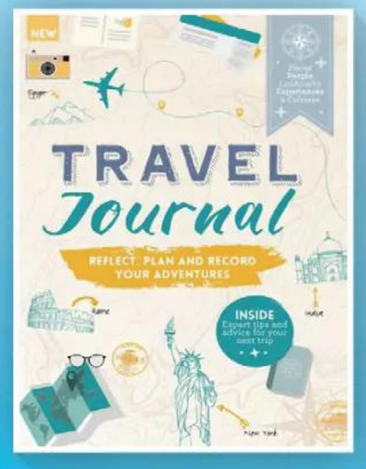






Get essential advice on how to make positive changes to your health and wellbeing





Get great savings when you buy direct from us

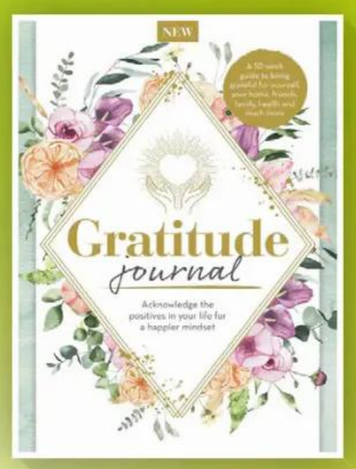
1000s of great titles, many not available anywhere else

World-wide delivery and super-safe ordering

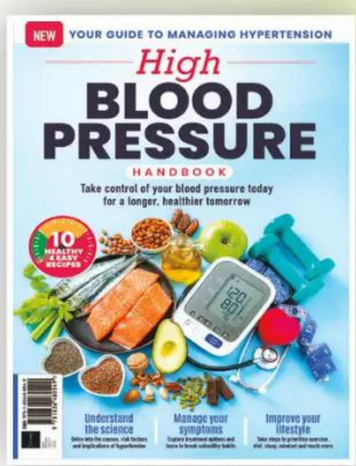












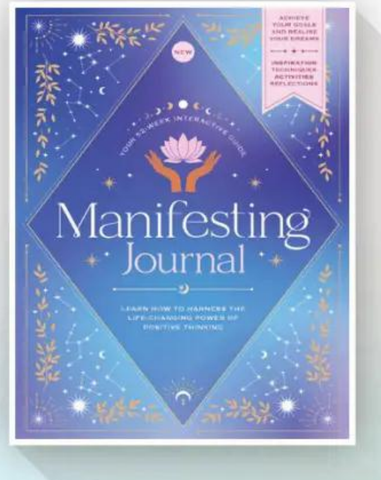


INSPIRING READS FOR A HAPPIER YOU

From travel and food to mindfulness and fitness, discover motivational books to enrich and enhance your life







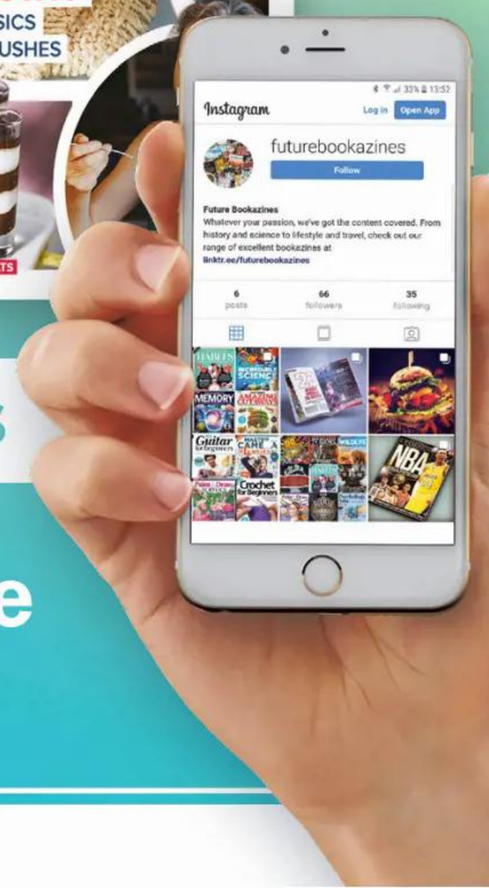








Learn delicious recipes and nutritional information for all tastes and lifestyles



Follow us on Instagram @futurebookazines

FUTURE

www.magazinesdirect.com/lifestyle

Magazines, back issues & bookazines.

Pots & Planters GARDENING GUIDE

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Editorial
Group Editor **Philippa Grafton**
Senior Art Editor **Stephen Williams**
Compiled by **Jacqueline Snowden**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**
Brand Director **Tim Mathers**
Managing Director **Grainne McKenna**

Cover images
Getty Images

Photography
All copyrights and trademarks are recognised and respected

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation
Global Business Development Manager **Jennifer Smith**
Head of UK Circulation **Emma Bone**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely, Vivienne Calvert, Maaya Mistry, Lawrence Brookes**

Printed in the UK

Distributed by Marketforce – www.marketforce.co.uk
For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

GPSR EU RP (for authorities only)
eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-14 11317, Tallinn, Estonia
hello@eucompliancepartner.com, +3375690241

Pots & Planters Gardening Guide Fourth Edition (HOB7520)

© 2026 Future Publishing Limited

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this bookazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards.

All contents © 2026 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Kevin Li Ying**
Non-Executive Chairman **Mark Brooker**
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

Widely Recycled

ipso. Regulated

Pots & Planters
GARDENING GUIDE

Liven up your outdoor space with stunning containers all year round



Pots masterclass

Learn everything you need to know about containers, from materials to drainage



Pest control

Discover how to protect your plants and banish your garden foes for good



Stylish recipes

Have a go at re-creating our favourite displays using seasonal blooms



Project ideas

Get creative in the colder months with our unique outdoor planter wall

BOOKAZINE