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Garden Designs

'Cooking' with Containers: Container-friendly Plant Combination Recipes



When spring

has sprung, the chill of winter has gone, cooking up plant container combination recipes can invite life back into to the garden. Plants add colorful texture, contrast and variety to an array of outdoor spaces.



"Container gardening gives homeowners the opportunity to create striking results for their outdoor living areas without a great deal of time commitment or difficulty," says Dan Heims, co-owner of Terra Nova Nurseries in Canby, Ore. "Whether a novice or seasoned gardener, incorporating the appropriate mix or combination of plants to containers is the most effective way to experience lasting results."

Designed by Heims and his team of horticulturists at Terra Nova Nurseries, these four container recipes will enliven even the shabbiest of winter-hardened locales this spring and summer:

"Twist of Lime"

Ingredients:

Hakonechloa 'All Gold'
Xanthosoma 'Lime Zinger'
Heuchera 'Mahogany'
Heuchera 'Lime Rickey'

The stunning, chartreuse, elephant's ear leaves of Xanthosoma 'Lime Zinger' stand out, adding height and a tropical flare to containers; its leaves reach 3 to 4 feet across. The gorgeous form of golden Japanese Forest Grass that is Hakonechloa 'All Gold' has arching, graceful, upright, and spiky foliage, adding texture and bright color to this container combination. "The glossy, mahogany-red, ruffled foliage of Heuchera 'Mahogany' produces wonderful, dense, shiny tones year-round," says Heims. Heuchera 'Lime Ricky' has chartreuse spring leaves, which turn to lime-green, showy, ruffled leaves for the remainder of the year. This recipe can brighten even the shadiest of spaces.

"Dawn to Dusk"

Ingredients:

Heuchera 'Marmalade'
Begonia 'River Nile'
Heuchera 'Midnight Rose'

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Athyrium 'Dre's Dagger'

Stunning, rich, shiny, undulating foliage adorn Terra Nova Nurseries' Heuchera 'Marmalade' in ranges of color from umber to deep-sienna with hot-pink undersides. Begonia 'River Nile' produces distinguishing chartreuse leaves with heavily edged black or red-brown. Its leaf edges are ruffled while the leaf bases swirl inward to the leaf center. The compact plant of Heuchera 'Midnight Rose' has burnished black leaves, which are thickly spotted, hot-pink in spring. Its summer leaves lighten with creamy-pink dots that adorn the foliage. The narrow, deep-green fronds of Athyrium 'Dre's Dagger' are crossed, coming to a narrow point with a terminal crest. Its statuesque form creates a dramatic quality in any container setting.

"Fun in the Shade"

Ingredients:

Heucherella 'Stoplight'
Heuchera 'Cinnabar Silver'
Polemonium 'Stairway to Heaven'
Eucomis 'Oakhurst'
Corydalis 'Berry Exciting'

Bright-yellow leaves and a large, stoplight-like red blotch embellish Heucherella 'Stoplight' in spring. The remarkable, purple-metallic leaves of Heuchera 'Cinnabar Silver' transform to silver, giving rise to striking cinnabar-red flowers. Because it is a compact plant with flowers that bloom just above the leaves, it is an excellent choice in container gardens. A favorite of Heim's, Polemonium 'Stairway to Heaven' has broad, bold, cream, variegated foliage with 12-inch stems bearing light-blue flowers; it is an exceptionally hardy, large-leafed, showy selection of Polemonium. The thick, fleshy, broadly linear leaves of Eucomis 'Oakhursts' form in a spear-like rosette with a pineapple-like array of purple flowers in late summer. 'Oakhurst' is a strong, red-purple form that creates an impact in containers. A vigorous, spreading Corydalis with succulent stems and gold, ferny leaves on a wide-spreading plant, 'Berry Exciting' produces fragrant, purple flowers.

"Purple Passion"

Ingredients:

Colocasia 'Black Magic'
Brunnera 'Jack Frost'
Begonia 'Benitochiba'
Heuchera 'Black Beauty'

"One of the few 'true blacks' of the plant world," says Heims, "the exotic form of Colocasia 'Black Magic' is tropical in appearance and loves moisture, making it superb for container gardens located around ponds or other water sources. 'Jack Frost' is a lovely Brunnera with silvered foliage on heart-shaped leaves with green veining and edged with a green border. The large, palmate leaves of Begonia 'Benitochiba' are a metallic, rose-red color; it is shrubby and self-branching with pint flowers and an upright cane-stem. The dark, glossy, ruffled leaves of Heuchera 'Black Beauty' are somewhat upright, catching sun from any direction. Attractive year-round and easy to grow, Terra Nova Nurseries' horticulturists recommend it as a striking accent in the Purple Passion container recipe.

"Creating beautiful container gardens using various plant selections, colors, and textures is a therapeutic and enjoyable leisure activity for the whole family," says Heims.

To learn about more plant container recipes, log onto www.terranovanurseries.com.