

Container Gardening

A container garden is a great way to bring the beauty of live plants to your outdoor spaces and add drama to your garden. Designing container gardens can be intimidating with so many beautiful plants in the Garden Center. Take a tip from gardening experts and use the Thriller-Filler-Spiller formula to design your containers.

When it comes to gardening with containers, you don't need to be a professional to design gorgeous planters. Just follow the Thriller-Filler-Spiller recipe for a balanced, colorful arrangement.

Thriller-Filler-Spiller is a catchy rhyme to guide you as you choose plants for your container garden masterpieces:

- Thriller plants' height and texture set the rhythm for the remaining plants.
- Fillers do exactly that, filling the middle space with masses of color and texture.
- Spillers draw the eye down and out as they drape over the edge of the container.

Thriller Plants

Thriller plants add drama, height and texture, and set the stage for the fillers and spillers. Place thriller elements in the center of your container arrangement, and if it's one-sided, place to the back.

Filler Plants

Filler plants pack the middle space with texture and color. If your container will be visible from all sides, place Filler plants around the Thriller, keeping them toward the middle of your container. If your container will only be visible from one or more sides, place Fillers between the Thriller and the visible sides. Don't forget that herbs like parsley, thyme and small rosemary plants can be tucked in as accents.

Spiller Plants

More than the other two elements of a well-designed mixed container, the Thriller and Filler, the Spiller gives a lush look to your finished planter. This element makes even a seasonal container look like it's been growing for years.

Cascading perennial groundcovers are typical choices for spillers and make quite a show with shots of chartreuse and variegated foliage. You can expand your options with stems of petunias or other trailing flowers.

The first rule for container gardening ensuring water can drain through the planter. Without a hole for water to flow through, plants will get soggy and roots will rot. Containers can be made of concrete, lightweight composite materials, terra cotta clay and glazed pottery.

Bigger is usually better when it comes to containers. You can fit more soil and more plants in a larger container and increase the visual impact. Larger containers won't dry out as quickly, too. A problem with larger containers, though, is portability. Urns and heavy containers should be settled in place before you plant them. You can also use planter caddies to move containers.

- Use good-quality, moisture-retentive, well-draining potting mix in your containers. To revive used potting mix, add a slow-release fertilizer and amendments like organic compost and peat.
- Maximize the impact of small containers by grouping them together. A corner filled with terra cotta containers in many sizes looks luxurious. Use the Thriller-Filler-Spiller technique here, too, with the tallest in the center or back, groups of fillers in the middle, and cascading elements on the perimeter.

Keep your containers looking fresh with these care tips:

- Regularly feed with an organic fertilizer. All that watering means nutrients wash out of the pot.
- Frequent watering is necessary to keep plants happy. In summer's heat, most containers need water every day it doesn't rain, and sometimes twice in one day.
- Some plants like it dry. Ornamental grasses, succulents including sedums, daylilies, geraniums, zinnias and marigolds like hot and dry conditions. Herbs like rosemary, oregano, lavender and thyme can take the heat, too.

Whether you have a terra cotta pot full of succulents or a backyard patio edged in raised planter boxes, containers bring the beauty of plants up close. This makes them enjoyable and easy to work with once you know a few tricks.