



CONTAINEROLOGY 101: TIPS FOR GORGEOUS, LONG-LASTING POTS

Tesselaar Plants asked gardeners across the country to share their best tricks

June 6, 2013 – **Con-tain-er-o-lo-gy**. It's the art and science of container gardening – or how to grow a good-looking plot in a pot.

“But a containerology degree doesn't have to be hard to earn,” joked Anthony Tesselaar, cofounder and president of international plant marketer Tesselaar Plants. “All you have to do is take fellow gardeners' advice about what works and what doesn't.”

That's why we're offering this cheat sheet of sorts – for container gardens that inspire, not expire.”

Shopping

- In his video “How to Build the Perfect Container Garden,” Dave Epstein (of the gardening how-to video site Growing Wisdom) suggests buying lightweight, synthetic pots mimicking the look of heavier materials that dry out quicker (like wood, metal or clay). That way, you can conserve water and lift the pots easier.
- One-plant pots make a powerful statement, especially when the plant is unique or unusual. Jimmy Turner, senior director of gardens at the Dallas Arboretum, recommends using the Storm™ series of agapanthus in containers for its architectural wow factor and drought and heat resistance (since it was the only agapanthus to survive the arboretum's famous plant trials in intense heat, drought and humidity). Jenny Wegley, the arboretum's research and greenhouse manager, loves Flower Carpet® roses' Next Generation line (bred for superior heat and humidity resistance) in large pots and hanging baskets.
- Don't forget fragrance. Graham Rice, editor in chief of the American Horticultural Society's *Encyclopedia of Perennials*, likes Fairy Magnolia® Blush – a new michelia hybrid that's perfect for pots and can be trained up a trellis. Tesselaar recommends Volcano® phlox, which is more compact than other varieties.
- Choose plants that are naturally disease, pest and weather resistant, says Tesselaar. He recommends Flower Carpet groundcover roses (winner of seven All Deutschland Rose designations – the world's highest honor for natural disease resistance), mildew-tolerant Volcano phlox and cordylines like Festival™ Burgundy and Burgundy Spire™ (virtually ignored by insects and wildlife).

- Choose plants with similar water and sun needs to cut down on maintenance, says Denise Pierce, a gardener from Red Bay, Alabama.

Designing

- When combining plants, Epstein recommends echoing or contrasting colors and textures. In his video, “Easy Tips for Growing Plants in Containers,” he notes how the broad, flat, ovate leaves of Tropicanna[®] cannas differ from the fleshy rosettes of echeveria, yet the two go together, since they’re both burgundy. In that same pot, however, he notes how you can contrast the dark burgundy with either a white petunia or purplish-pink celosia.
- One way to organize color combinations in pots, says Pierce, is to use hues that are similar (i.e. three different shades of pink or yellow with yellow-green and green). This combination creates a harmonious, calming effect. A more dramatic effect can be achieved by using complementary colors (those across from each other on the color wheel – like blue with orange, yellow with purple and red with green).
- Think of container gardens as moveable props, says Tesselaar: “Use them to fill bare spots in the landscape, change out plants to reflect new seasons and reposition them to accommodate changing sun or shade.” Bring them with you as you move throughout the property.
- Todd Holloway, owner of Pot Incorporated, an award-winning container and landscaping company in Vancouver, British Columbia, suggests keeping a container design in proportion to its pot by devoting one third of the height to the pot and the remaining two-thirds to the plants, or vice versa.
- Think thriller-spiller-filler, says Epstein in “Easy Tips for Container Gardens”: “You want something that spills over the sides, something that fills the center, and something that’s the ‘wow factor,’ or thriller.” For the thriller, he chooses Tropicanna cannas; for the filler, he chooses purple celosia and for the spiller, he chooses white petunias.

Planting/potting

- After filling the pot halfway with soilless mix and working in a slow-release, granular fertilizer, Epstein likes to pot the tallest plant first, first loosening its roots. (If you put the tall plant in the center, the filler can go all the way around that and the spiller all the way around that, he notes. If you put the tall plant in back, the filler can go in front of that and the spiller in front of that).
- If the pot doesn’t already have holes for drainage on the bottom, Epstein adds them with a drill. For even better drainage, he then fills the bottom of the pot with rocks (or even sticks, shells and other organic matter) and then a soilless, lightweight potting mix. This can also raise the height of the bottom of the pot, so you don’t use as much potting mix. He also uses smaller, upside-down plastic pots inside the pot as pedestals for the plants.

- Stick your finger 2 to 3 inches into the soil to see if your container needs watering, says Epstein. If it's dry, give it a drink..
- Your container's volume should be roughly a third to a half the size of the eventual volume of the mature plants, says Holloway. If your mature plants are expected to grow to 3 feet tall by 3 feet wide, for instance, your planter should be no smaller than 1 to 1.5 feet tall by 1 to 1.5 feet wide.

Maintaining

- Tesselaar recommends watering in the morning, when it's cooler (for less evaporation). "Make it part of your morning routine, like brushing your teeth."
- "If you want roses that stand up to hot, dry conditions in containers, the original Flower Carpet line is an excellent choice," says Epstein. "For hot, humid weather, Flower Carpet's new Next Generation line – which got excellent reviews from the Dallas Arboretum – is your best bet."
- Use a good quality potting mix, says Pierce, and fertilize when planting, using a slow-release fertilizer.
- Many patio plants can be brought inside for the winter near a bright windowsill, says Epstein. He likes Festival Burgundy cordyline, which – unlike many outdoor plants brought inside – won't dry out in forced-air heating.

Fact sheets

[Flower Carpet roses](#)

[Tropicanna cannas](#)

[Storm series of agapanthus](#)

[Fairy Magnolia Blush](#)

[Volcano phlox](#)

[Festival Burgundy cordyline](#), [Burgundy Spire cordyline](#)

Hi-res images – all available for your use

[Flickr collection – Containerology](#)

Downloadable videos

[Easy Tips for Growing Plants in Containers](#)

[How to Build the Perfect Container Garden featuring Tropicanna canna](#)

[Growing Festival Burgundy in containers](#)

[How to Grow Flower Carpet Roses in Containers](#)

About Tesselaar

Tesselaar Plants searches the world and introduces new plants for the home garden, landscape, home décor and gift markets. Tesselaar undertakes extensive research and development of its varieties and, once they're selected for introduction, provides marketing and promotional support through its grower and retail network. The Tesselaar

philosophy is to introduce exceptional plants while “making gardening easy” for everyone, so it makes its products as widely available as possible. Tesselaar believes the more gardeners there are, the better it is for everyone.

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