

Planting pots for autumn and winter

As summer bedding fades in pots and containers it's time for a change. If you hang on to the bitter end they may survive for a week or two, but then you could be left with horrible looking pots through autumn and winter. There is no need. Garden centres and nurseries are brimming with colourful plants that can light up your pots for autumn, winter and maybe into next spring. The choice is amazing: dwarf evergreen shrubs, perennials with colourful foliage and plenty of flowers to carry your patio through those colder months. You could even add a few bulbs for spring colour.

Even though plants are not growing as vigorously at this time of the year they still need a good growing environment, so empty out the remains of summer bedding and use the old growing medium as soil conditioner. You can spread it on beds or borders. Or keep it on one side to use when planting. Once the pots are empty put a good layer of broken crocks in the bottom over the drainage hole. Drainage is particularly important in winter; waterlogged pots result in root death and can freeze, causing the pot to break.



Use the right growing medium

Growing media containing loam are better for long-term planting in pots. The tiny particles of soil hang on to water and nutrients more efficiently. Although less frequent watering is required in autumn and winter, moisture around the roots is essential.

Vitax Q4 Multi-Purpose Compost with John Innes is the perfect growing medium for containers. It contains all the nutrients your plants will need for healthy growth and plenty of flowers.



If you are planting for the long term, for example planting an evergreen shrub in a container, I would add even more **Vitax John Innes No.3** to the mix to increase the loam content. Gardeners planting up a number of



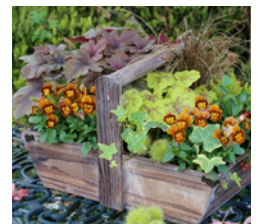
containers may prefer to buy Vitax Q4 Multi-Purpose Compost and Vitax John Innes No.3 and mix their own. I do exactly that, in a wheelbarrow. That way you get an even mixture and it is easier to fill the pots.

Plant a display that lasts

Now it is time to get creative: your imagination is the only limit. There are infinite planting combinations you can create: some with immediate impact and some enduring ones. The secret of success is the marriage of planting and container. Always choose your plants with an idea of the container you will use them in. If buying new pots, aim for larger ones. These offer more planting space and hold more growing medium to support the plants. When everything is growing quickly next spring they will not dry out as quickly either.



Crafty gardeners use their pots and containers as a temporary home for plants that will find their way into beds and borders the following season. Small specimens of subjects like euonymus, skimmia, buxus and Erica are widely available for use in containers. Enjoy them this way through the winter and then move them out into the garden next spring. Alternatively you may choose larger specimens to grow in some of your pots for several seasons. Plants like pittosporum, euphorbia, carex and acer are great value in pots and last for years.





Just add colour

However most of us crave some colour, so pansies, violas, cyclamen and bellis are very appealing. They are a great way of adding colour alongside longer lasting foliage subjects such as heucheras, heucherellas and carex. Mini-cyclamen are great for early autumn colour in sheltered situations beside the house or on the doorstep. They will not cope with severe frost and dislike extreme wet and cold. However they are a delightful injection of colour and fragrance for a few weeks. Violas tend to be tougher and longer blooming than winter pansies. Look out for Viola Endurio varieties: they keep going in the coldest winter weather. Both pansies and violas benefit from dead heading, at least until they are well established.



Plant for impact

You will get far greater impact by limiting the colour palette in a pot or container, in just the same way as you do when putting a planting combination together in the garden. Choose a lead plant that works with the container; then select its planting partners. I would also emphasise that it's vital that you think about what this container will look like in situ. A trendy, contemporary container can look completely out of place in a traditional setting.



A finishing touch

Cover the surface of the growing medium with a layer of **Vitax Gravel** when you have finished planting. Not only does this give the planting an attractive finish, but it also keeps the winter wet from splashing back onto the plants. It reflects light and warmth and your plants will be happier and grow more successfully.



The need to feed?

Vitax composts contain sufficient slow release fertiliser to maintain your plants for several weeks during autumn and winter. Plants that are still going strong as winter turns to spring will appreciate regular feeding with **Vitax Q4 Premium Flower and Fruit Feed**. This contains organic nutrients including plenty of potash which strengthens growth while stimulating flower production.



Finally

As gardens get smaller gardening in pots and containers becomes more important. For those with courtyards and balconies it is the only way to garden. For everyone it's a wonderful way to bring the garden close to the house and well planted autumn and winter containers really make the view of the garden so much more appealing when the weather becomes colder.




Andy McIndoe for Vitax



What you will need to create your shopping list



Q4 Multipurpose
Compost with
John Innes



Q4 Multipurpose
Compost



Multipurpose
Compost



John Innes No. 3
Compost



Q4 Premium
Flower & Fruit Feed



Gravel

Gardeners who know and trust our brands



Get in touch

For more garden inspiration and advice, visit the website at: www.gardenworld.co.uk

Contact our customer service team:

Tel: +44 (0)1530 510060

Email: info@vitax.co.uk

Vitax Ltd. Owen Street, Coalville, Leicester, LE67 3DE



Andy McIndoe



Andy McIndoe is a practical horticulturist and author. He lectures widely to garden groups and horticultural societies, writes for various magazines and publications and is a regular on BBC local radio. His advice is based on practical experience in just about all areas of gardening from growing a few vegetables to showing orchids.

Andy designs and advises on gardens of all sizes and has been responsible for 25 Gold Medal winning exhibits at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. He and his wife Ros have a 2 acre garden, Sandhill Farm in Hampshire which is open to groups by appointment. Both keen gardeners their special interests include trees and shrubs and using pots and containers for all year round colour.



During 40 years' experience selling garden products in garden centres Andy has always recommended and used Vitax products. Vitax Q4 fertiliser is his fertiliser of choice in his own garden, his clients' gardens and his recommendation to all gardeners he advises.

Website: www.andymcindoe.com
Follow @AndyMcIndoe on twitter