

Placing pots

A landscape designer's top seven tips for incorporating containers into your yard

By STEPHEN ORR + Photographs by KAREN BUSSOLINI

For many plant lovers, container gardening is all about which plants will look great in a given pot. That's important, but thoughtful placement of a container can play an equally significant role in your yard. Robert Welsch, owner of Westover Landscape Design, in Tarrytown, New York, suggests thinking about pots as visual punctuation. "You can place one at the end of a path to lead your eye through the garden or to signal a change in direction on a walkway," he says. "A well-placed container also gives you a moment to pause and enjoy the garden."

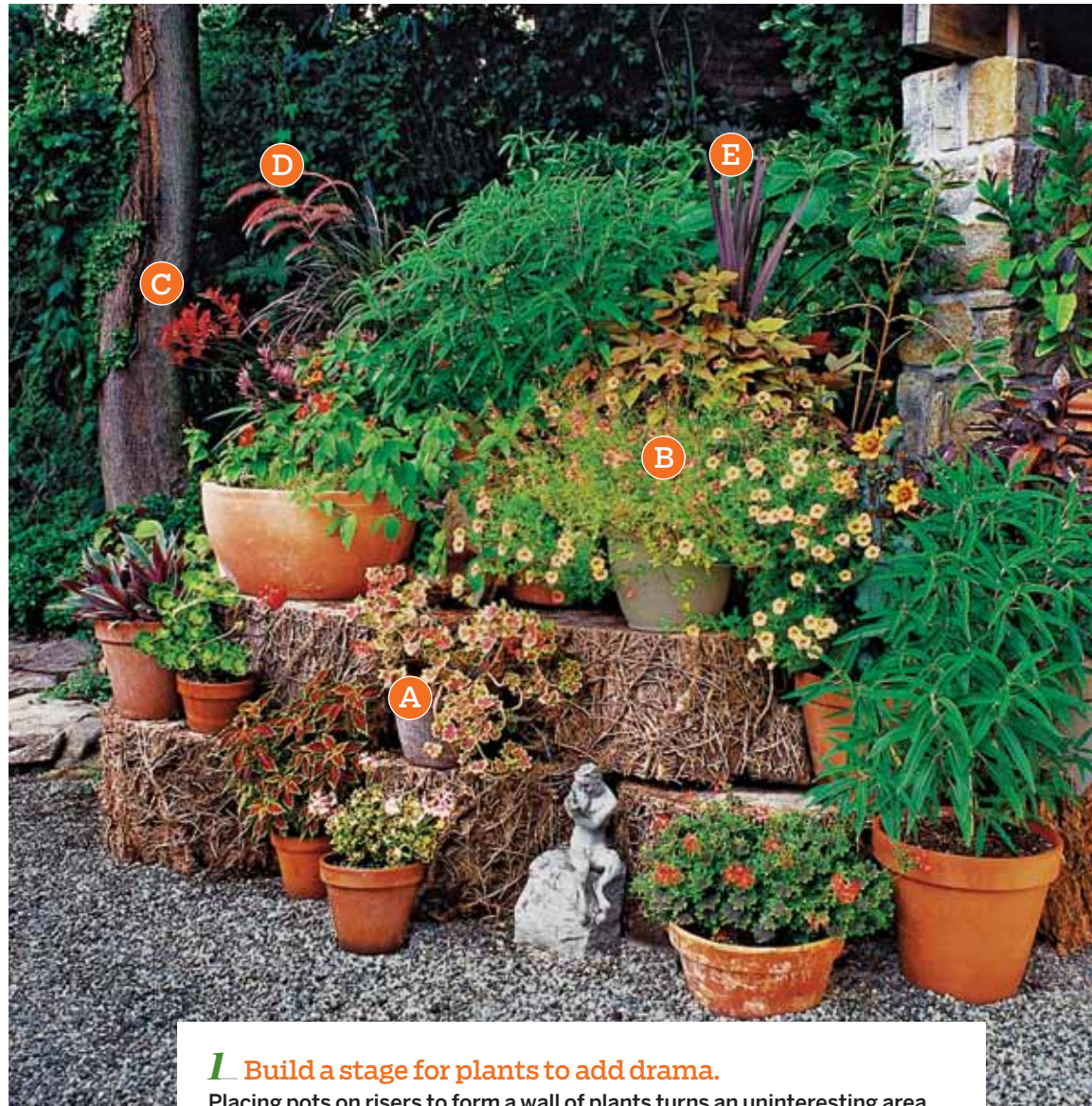
On the practical side, since plants in containers are elevated, they dry out more quickly than those in the ground, and it's essential to plan how they'll get adequate water. Here are some guidelines to follow to ensure that potted plants flourish:

- Be sure there is a hose or water source nearby so that you don't have to lug around watering cans, or position a pot so that it receives daily moisture from an automatic watering system.

- As with any plantings, potted plants should be placed where they'll thrive. Put moisture-loving ones in shadier spots and drought-tolerant species in hot, sunny places.

- Container plants need more nutrients. A time-release pellet fertilizer works well, or go organic by dousing pots with diluted fish emulsion once or twice before midsummer.

Pots are infinitely changeable: Swap them around according to season or mood. With container plantings, there are no permanent mistakes. What doesn't work one year can easily be fixed the next. The following ideas from designer Robert Welsch will get you off to a good start.



L Build a stage for plants to add drama.

Placing pots on risers to form a wall of plants turns an uninteresting area of the yard into a remarkable one. Welsch uses the sliced-up trunk of an old maple tree to vary container heights, placing tall plants in back, short ones in front. He keeps the arrangement cohesive by using one shade of terra-cotta for the pots and a narrow palette for the plants: yellow and green leaves of zonal geraniums (A) and pale orange and yellow million bells (*Calibrachoa*) (B). Along the top, subtropical kangaroo paws (C), deep purple fountain grass (D), and New Zealand flax (E) give texture.

OR TRY THIS > Instead of logs, use upside-down terra-cotta pots of various sizes. If you group them tightly, you can also make risers from cinder block or brick and let trailing plants cover them. →

landscaping

2 Use pots to mark the edges of stairs or walls.

An overscaled hypertufa bowl sits like a guardrail on this terrace, marking a turning place on the steps and the edge of the low wall. In the bowl, each plant plays a role: Spires of 'Elegant Feather,' a new annual eupatorium (A), give the composition surprising 7-foot height. Large-leaved Brazilian coleus (B) is the main filler, while orange and pink million bells (*Calibrachoa*) (C) add color. Seen from below, the greenery in the pots softens this stony area and emphasizes the changes in elevation.

OR TRY THIS > In a more modern yard, use a series of concrete or metal cube planters filled with bamboo or tall grasses. In a formal setting, fill a large metal urn with a shrub or a small tree, such as a Japanese maple.

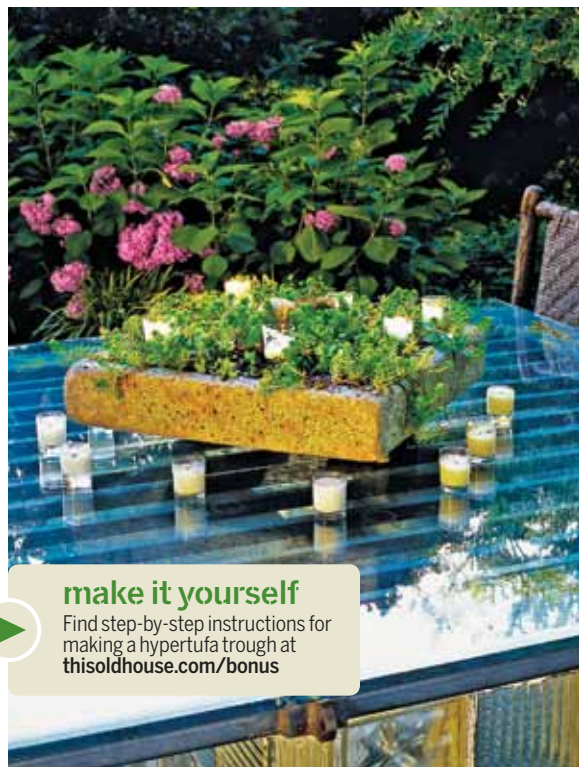


3 Create a long-lasting centerpiece.

Use a container on an outdoor table to make a miniature landscape.

This hypertufa planter is filled with sedums. These come in many colors, but their main calling card is their wide range of intricate textures. Add candles to play them up at night.

OR TRY THIS > Plant low succulents in the saucer of a large glazed ceramic pot. Drill a drainage hole in the bottom first or make sure to tip out excess moisture after you water. Even simpler, plant a metal tray with moss, Scotch moss, or a scented herb such as creeping thyme.



make it yourself

Find step-by-step instructions for making a hypertufa trough at thisoldhouse.com/bonus

fountain how-to

Learn how to turn a container into a water feature at thisoldhouse.com/bonus

4 Turn a container into a fountain near the house.

This simple water feature, made from a Balinese urn, dresses up a rocky area at the bottom of a slope. It also

adds calming sound to a nearby seating area and masks street noise. Because it's placed near the house, there's easy access to an electrical outlet for plugging in the fountain pump.

OR TRY THIS > For a more casual look, fill a zinc or galvanized metal tub with aquatic plants and a small bubble-jet pump.

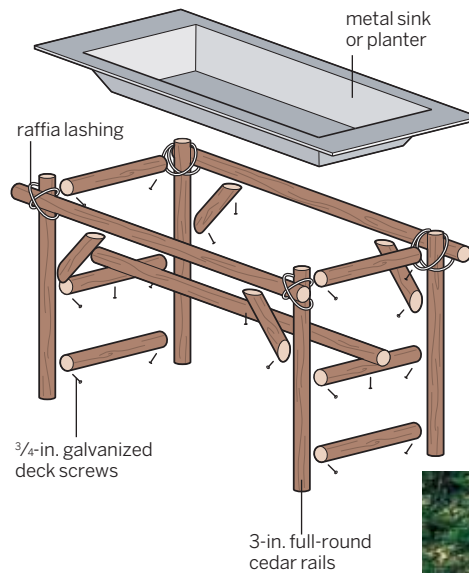




5 Create a console table-type planter for alongside seating.

Instead of displaying plants on a metal stand, build a planter with legs and place it next to furniture on your deck, terrace, or patio. This planter was made from an old metal sink supported by rustic cedar posts, then filled with cactus mix, planted with succulents, and topped with gravel. In this almost waist-high display, a vivid-red pancake kalanchoe and cool-green sedums can be fully appreciated. Light-catching objects—fishing buoys, slag glass, and rock crystal—add an element of surprise.

OR TRY THIS > Show off a collection of plants: ferns, alpines, even orchids.



HOW TO

Build a planter on legs

You can make a planter like this one with a metal sink or zinc planter with a lip (jamaligarden.com has some nice ones) and full-round cedar rails from the fencing section of your local lumber yard.



7 Use a big-leaved potted plant as a screen.

By blocking sight lines with a tall plant, you create a sense that a yard is bigger than it is. The tall spray of a robust tropical, such as this ornamental ginger (which will have to winter indoors in some areas), also makes the path it sits alongside feel more enclosed and intimate.

OR TRY THIS > Use a multistemmed birch, a giant ornamental grass, or a flowering tropical, such as a canna lily. If the pot is distinctive enough, you could even leave it unplanted as a piece of sculpture. 🏠

6 Use pots to create a stopping point.

Tall potted plants at the end of this low wall obscure a turn in the path, catching your interest so that you pause before rounding the corner. There's a wide range of colors here, but there's a scheme—silver, yellow, orange, and pink—and choosing pots in similar shapes and a single material creates harmony. Tall, variegated ginger catches the breeze and adds movement. Flowering tropicals, such as lantana, give strong color all summer, while silver eucalyptus knits the varied colors together.

OR TRY THIS > Make a more subtle statement with just one large decorative pot, and fill it with a cascading ivy or licorice plant.

