



Foxtails and opulent blooms

- ❖ *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln'
- ❖ *Dahlia* 'Nuit d'Été'
- ❖ Pot chrysanthemums
- ❖ *Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora* 'Red King'

Red chrysanthemums and burgundy *Dahlia* 'Nuit d'Été' anchor *Pennisetum* 'Hameln', the flowerheads of which float above, punctuated by sprays of *Crocosmia*. Keep the dahlia well deadheaded and compost moist, and the scheme will be attractive for weeks.

Season stretchers

Though high-summer colours may have gone from our pots and baskets, well-chosen plants will continue the container interest until the first frosts and beyond

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While the nights draw in as quickly as ever during

autumn, in many gardens they have been increasingly frost-free until late in the season. This provides an exciting opportunity to create exuberant pots specifically to light up this often forgotten time of year, filled with bold colours and fizzing textures that will extend the season into autumn.

Seasonal combinations

A surprisingly diverse range of plants has autumn appeal and they can easily be combined to great effect. Some, such as asters and chrysanthemums, save their prolific displays of bright flowers for late summer and autumn, and are an obvious choice to add intense bursts of colour to pots. Then there are those, such as *Pyracantha*, winter squashes and ornamental grasses, that usefully bear all manner of long-lasting, decorative fruits, berries and seedheads.

Many plants with a long season of interest will still look good late in the year and some, such as acers and *Leucothoe*, have foliage that takes on fiery shades and can set an arrangement alight with long-lasting colour.

Autumn container care

With summer's heat and dry conditions past, autumn pots are far less demanding to care for. Growth slows as temperatures and light levels gradually fall which, combined with more rainfall, means that less watering and feeding are required to keep plants looking their best.

When the season draws to a close and displays are dismantled, the small shrubs and perennials that fill the containers can also be planted out individually to become established in the garden before winter sets in. ●



Foliage, flowers and berries create autumnal tones

- ❖ *Pyracantha* 'Golden Charmer'
- ❖ *Dahlia* 'Knockout'
- ❖ Pot chrysanthemum

The glossy foliage of *Pyracantha* forms the backbone of this composition: the colour of its glowing berries is echoed in the cluster of double chrysanthemum blooms at the front of the pot. *Dahlia* 'Knockout' dominates with its purple-bronze leaves and yellow flowers. This pot will perform until the first hard frosts.

Enlivened by leaf colour and form

- ❖ *Dahlia* 'Clarion'
- ❖ *Hebe* 'Royal Blue'
- ❖ *Miscanthus oligostachyus* 'Afrika'
- ❖ Pot asters

Soft purple-blue flowers fill the front of the pot: long-lasting asters and heads of evergreen *Hebe*. The dark centres of yellow *Dahlia* 'Clarion' match its bronze foliage. The slender leaves of the grass are tinged gold, before taking on ever more red tints as autumn progresses.





Focus on foliage

- ❖ *Hosta* 'Tattoo'
- ❖ *Saxifraga* 'Cuscutiformis'
- ❖ *Carex comans*
- ❖ *Elymus magellanicus*

Acid-yellow leaves traced with green make *Hosta* 'Tattoo' the star in this arrangement. A spray of red-brown *Carex comans* tucked behind co-ordinates with the terracotta pan, allowing the leaves of *Elymus magellanicus* to contrast rather than clash with the hosta. Pale veining on the deep green leaves of *Saxifraga* 'Cuscutiformis' also picks up the silver of the grass in a container planting that will look good even once the hosta's deciduous leaves have faded.



Reliable perennials and unusual annuals

- ❖ *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm'
- ❖ *Amaranthus* 'Autumn Palette' (annual)
- ❖ *Cucurbita pepo* 'Wee-B-Little' (annual)

Centred on a long-lasting cluster of black-eyed *Rudbeckia* daisies, the rust-coloured plumes of *Amaranthus* 'Autumn Palette' shoot up, flanked by the blades and flower spikes of grasses *Panicum virgatum* 'Heavy Metal' and *Pennisetum villosum*. Orange *Crocsmia* x *crocsmiiflora* 'Star of the East' mingles among these tall plants while orange-fruited pumpkin 'Wee-B-Little' tones in as it tumbles over the side.

Care for lasting colour

Extending summer colour into autumn is a matter of good maintenance. Deadhead flowering plants regularly for more blooms, and feed containers with a high-potash fertiliser to encourage flowering rather than leafy growth. Replace spent plants to add renewed vigour to displays.

More good plants for autumn containers:

- ❖ *Vaccinium corymbosum* (highbush blueberry) A handsome shrub for ericaceous compost that follows delicious dark blue summer berries with vibrant scarlet autumn colour.
- ❖ *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' This grass boasts cascading yellow foliage streaked with green and flushed red in autumn.
- ❖ *Pennisetum glaucum* 'Purple Majesty' An exotic tender grass for full sun with aubergine-coloured leaves and fluffy flowerheads.

- ❖ *Ceratostigma willmottianum* A small shrub covered with clear blue late-season flowers with bright red leaves in late autumn.
- ❖ *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm' Bright golden, black-centred, long-lasting daisies can reach up to 75cm (30in) high.
- ❖ *Sedum spectabile* 'Herbstfreude' Flat, dense, pink-red flowerheads are borne above succulent, glaucous leaves.

www.rhs.org.uk For information on year-round container care, enter 'Container maintenance' in the search box at RHS Online



Low-growing, luxuriantly dense planting

- ❖ *Calluna vulgaris* 'Aphrodite'
- ❖ *Aster novi-belgii* 'Blue Lagoon'
- ❖ *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle'
- ❖ *Leucothoe fontanesiana* 'Rainbow'

As Japanese maples take on their autumn shades, *Aster novi-belgii* 'Blue Lagoon' draws the eye with violet flowers. Their yellow centres are picked up in the lemony variegation of *Leucothoe fontanesiana* 'Rainbow' as it spills over the edge of the pot. A mat of pink *Calluna vulgaris* 'Aphrodite' creates a perfect foil for the silver foliage of *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle'.

STYLING: IAN HODGSON (ABOVE), PHOTOGRAPHY & STYLING: GRAHAM STRONG (LEFT AND RIGHT)