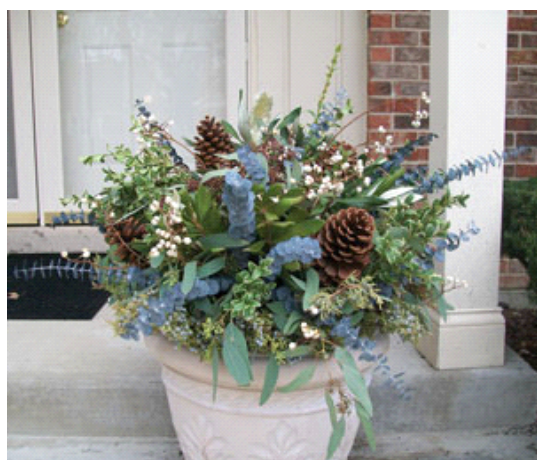


Features

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Pots With Potential

Ginny Hodgson



We've all seen at least one ... that drop-dead gorgeous fall or winter container that makes your head spin. It's SO chockfull of interesting textures and colors. Chances are this dazzling container consists of more than just plants. Whether it contains fresh, dried, artificial or preserved accents—or a combination of all of the above—doesn't really matter. What does matter is the end result. If your containers and porch pots are looking a little too average to you these days, perhaps it's time for a design upgrade.

To tap into this ever-growing container accent trend, it's time to look outside our garden-centric world for inspiration. Why not borrow some ideas from our florist friends who are so talented at making generic planters into seasonally themed showstoppers? Do you think floral accents are just for interiors? Not any more. There is a wide range of weather-worthy material to choose from that works wonderfully in outdoor pots. The possibilities are endless and include everything from natural pods to glittered pinecones to preserved eucalyptus in every color to cut branches and berries. Find everything from the usual to the unique at Clesen Wholesale, among other companies that specialize in such offerings. Keep in mind when purchasing accents that there are essentials beyond the decorative to consider, specifically length of stem. For outdoor containers, you'll have better success with a 15-in. to 18-in. stem rather than the typical 6-in. florist stem.

From Simple to Stunning

To take your containers to the next level and grow your profits, consider these ideas:

1. Choose distinct themes.

Whether your personal style is naturalistic and native (think dried lotus pods, golden yarrow, winterberry stems full of berries) or glitzy and glam (black-glittered birch branches, silver snowberries, preserved proteas and the like) it's safer to pick two or three distinctly different themes for your containers. Remember, you're designing for a wide variety of customers, not yourself. Many of the accents used should be able to work in multiple design styles, but it's also important to pick a few accents that define each theme clearly.

2. Share the not-so-secret recipe.

We all know the devil is in the details. Many a profitable pot has been derailed by overuse of container accents. They are called accents for a reason, and should be used effectively but somewhat sparingly to enhance your planters. Make sure the staff that are creating these beauties know the correct quantities the design recipes require to ensure profitability.

3. Use container plant material with a long shelf life.

It just makes sense to dress up more cabbage, kale and grasses for fall than showier but short-lived mums. The same goes for winter. There are many inexpensive greens out there, but pick a type of longer-lasting green and price your pots accordingly. Fraser fir is an excellent choice when trying to balance budget and longevity of plant material, as are boxwood and noble fir.

4. Consider the container itself.

Do you have some beautiful glazed pottery that has been hanging around too long? Think it's time to show your customers how classy and upgraded your terracotta can get? Here's your chance to show your customers that these pretty pots are first rate—while clearing some inventory, as well. Using your customer's container? If so, this should give you a little more wiggle room on the price of the product inside, so consider upgrading your base greens for winter to oregonia and/or silver fir.

5. “Make it” and “Take it.”

Yes, we love the “take it” customers—those folks who pick up our pre-made containers, no matter the price, and away they go. But don't overlook or undersell to your “make it” customers, either. All they need is a gentle nudge toward creating their own container magic. Consider container recipe handouts and bunched accents surrounding your display of finished products. Winter workshops are great fun, too. It's hard to create an ugly winter greens container, and nothing increases sales like success! **GP**

A self-avowed plantaholic, Ginny Hodgson is a 23-year green industry veteran who spent 18 years working at and managing garden centers. After a stint as a woody plant buyer for a residential landscape firm, she is now an Account Manager for Clesen Wholesale, a seasonal annuals and winter decorations supplier in Evanston, Illinois. You can contact her at info@clesen.com.