

Contain your plants

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THE JOURNAL NEWS

(Original publication: April 3, 2007)

Just because nighttime temperatures still dip below freezing with a good degree of regularity, there's no reason you can't plant a few colorful containers and put them outside for the rest of spring.

Instead of reaching for a traditional Easter lily this week, why not try making a cool-season container of your own with a mix of hardy annuals like alyssum and pansies and spring-blooming bulbs like tulips and hyacinths? You can even add a few hardy perennials like heuchera or English ivy and enjoy the show all summer. Just swap out the spent bulbs in a few weeks with another round of annuals coming into flower.

When selecting plants for a container, Noah Schwartz, the head grower at Matterhorn Nursery in Pomona, suggests looking for a range of heights and growing habits.

"You want to have something that's tall, something that's medium height and something that's more low-growing," he says. "The tall one might be something architectural, the medium one should be a good filler, the low one should be something cascading down over the edge. Your hope is that they intertwine and weave together."

It's OK to leave some of the taller plants, especially bulbs, in their plastic pots inside the container - this gives them more support and makes it easier to swap them out as they die back.

In general, more is good. You want a full, crammed look. "I don't want to see any of the soil after I finish building a container," Schwartz says. A final layer of woodland moss helps to hide any bare spots.

Color schemes you may want to try include a cool blue, pink and white theme, a mix of hot colors like reds, yellows and oranges or a simple, elegant palette of pale green and white.

When selecting plants at the nursery, look for ones with lots of buds, not just fully formed flowers, so you'll be able to enjoy a few weeks of blooms.

If you already have a favorite container, many nurseries are happy to have you bring it in and let them help you fill it with plants that should stand up to the vagaries of spring weather. If temperatures dip into or below the mid-20s, you may want to bring your containers in for the night or at least move them close to the house, just to be safe.

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COOL-SEASON CONTAINERS: Here are some bulbs, annuals and perennials that work well in containers and don't mind the cool nights of early spring:

Alyssum	Eucalyptus	Hyacinth	Verbena
Bacopa	Hellebore	Pansy	Viola
Calibrachoa	Heuchera	Tulip	



PHOTO CREDIT: Kathy Gardner/The Journal News
Noah Schwartz, grower at Matterhorn Nursery in Pomona, builds a container garden that mixes blooming spring tulips, gold baby ivy and penny yellow viola.