

THRILLERS, SPILLERS AND FILLERS

Containers continue their popular trend in the gardening world. From high-rise patio gardens to the front porch at the ranch, containers offer gardeners ample opportunity to experiment with color and texture. Here is just one method for putting together eye-popping containers using the reliable design notion of “thrillers, fillers, and spillers.”

Thrillers are the larger, more dramatic plants that lend height and a focal point to containers. Larger thrillers might include anything from small trees and shrubs like Peppermint Willow (*Agonis*), fruit trees, upright *Fuchsia*, *Abutilon*, and *Camellia*, to bold, large leaved tropical-looking plants like *Philodendron*, *Canna*, Dragon Wing Begonias and New Zealand Flax (*Phormium*) Thrillers might also include larger perennials like *Salvia* or *Gaura* as well as ornamental grasses like Mexican Feather Grass and Leather Leaved Sedge (*Carex buchananii*).

Spillers, as the name implies, spill over and soften the edge of the pot. Spillers might include trailing plants with colorful foliage like *Vinca*, Creeping Charlie, and Licorice Vine (*Helichrysum*) or one of the many mounding/trailing annuals and perennials like *Nemesia*, *Fuchsia*, *Scaevola*, *Lobelia*, Alyssum, and *Portulaca*.

Fillers simply provide color and texture by filling the space between thrillers and spillers. Here we have a lot of opportunity for color and contrast. Almost any plant could be used as a filler depending on the size/design of the container. Fillers include many of the colorful annuals like Marigolds, *Cosmos*, *Impatiens* and *Begonia* and perennials like Dahlias, Dianthus, and African Daisies. And don't forget colorful foliage as fillers like *Heuchera*, *Iresine*, *Acalypha*, *Setcreasea*, *Coleus*, and ornamental grasses and sedges (*Carex*).

**For any type of container gardening,
always start by selecting the container first.
Always.**

To begin **(1) choose a thriller** that *is at least as tall as the pot* and has some feature that ties in with your container, e.g. burgundy-leaved *Canna* or New Zealand Flax with a burgundy pot; blue flowering *Salvia* with a blue pot; glossy-leaved *Fatsia japonica* with glossy green pot.

Next **(2) pick a spiller** that totally contrasts with the color of the container. For instance use a chartreuse or gold foliage plant (e.g. *Helichrysum* 'Limelight', *Vinca* 'Illumination', *Ivy/Hedera* 'Gold Child') with a dark red, burgundy, blue, or black pot; use dark purple flowers (e.g. dark blue *Lobelia*, violet trailing *Petunias* and *Calibrachoa*) with white or yellow pots. Select white or yellow flowering plants (e.g. *Nemesia* 'Opal Innocence', yellow *Calibrachoa*) for a darker colored pot.

Then **(3) select fillers** that contrast in color and texture with everything else. Texturally, if your selected thrillers and spillers have larger or more rounded leaves, select a delicate, airy filler like *Dianthus*, Baby's Breath or an ornamental grass. If you're using a lacy spiller/trailer like Lotus vine or Asparagus fern, choose fillers with larger leaves like *Begonia*, *Coleus* or *Iresine*.

Be sure the plants you select are compatible in terms of light and watering requirements. Remember that odd numbers look better than even numbers. One or three thrillers would look better than two. Select three or five spillers instead of four. Depending on the scale, some thrillers in smaller pots may work as fillers in larger pots. Some fillers in smaller pots may work as spillers in larger pots.

Again this is just one easy, structured way to put together great pots. Your creations are limited only by your imagination. And remember, it's gotta be fun.