

# STYLISH, PRETTY POTS: FILL THEM UP

Pretty flowerpots are a garden's centerpieces, and they don't need a lot of pampering to make you and your garden look good. Fill some pots with colorful plants now, and enjoy them for months.

Joan Mazat plants hundreds of flowerpot combinations every year as part of her job with the Ball Horticultural Co. near Chicago. Mazat is in charge of poinsettias, geraniums and cut flowers, but she has been working with the company's team of flowerpot experts for years, "in charge of everything weird, wild and wonderful," she says. Snazzy combinations in flowerpots are her specialty.

Every year, Mazat and the Ball flowerpot experts put together more than 200 combinations of annual flowers, and 120 or more pots of perennials or of mixed perennials and annuals. The plantings are part of the company's plant trials; it is also a way to supply garden shop owners and gardeners with a little inspiration.

Mixing annuals, perennials and shrubs in flowerpots is a great idea, Mazat says. "Most people will not put annuals, perennials, shrubs and foliage plants together," she says, but the effect can be stunning.

Mazat's one, unbreakable rule for flowerpot combinations is a simple one: Do not plant sun-loving and shade-loving plants in the same pot and expect them both to thrive. "If you do that, you will be very unhappy with the results," she says.

Shrubs are underappreciated choices for pots, says Stacey Hirvela, who works with Proven Winners ColorChoice Shrubs. Proven Winners plants, including long-blooming Lo and Behold butterfly bushes, disease-resistant Oso Easy roses, and My Monet weigela, look great growing by themselves in a flowerpot, but they're even more fun with annual and perennial flowers and ornamental grasses, Hirvela says.

"I'm the kind of person who says, 'The more the merrier,'" Hirvela says. "They pair well with trailing plants, with something rambling around and through, and sometimes with something else as a centerpiece."

These days, garden shops make it easy to come up with good-looking combinations for flowerpots. Many have potting stations among the rows of plants, as well as tip sheets for shoppers. Customers can plant their purchases in pots right in the shop to see how they look. Some shops hold workshops and demonstrations for gardeners or offer ready-planted combinations.

Choosing plants that look great together is really as easy as walking around a garden shop and trying out combinations in a shopping cart, Mazat says. Plant tags describe the conditions plants like, so if you have a sunny spot, start by browsing the sun-loving plants, and pick out colors and textures that appeal to you. Mazat recommends starting with something big and striking.

"I start with my foundation plant --



Heat-loving annual flowers and tropical plants are great choices for a big pot on a sunny deck. A handsome dwarf banana is the tallest plant in this pot, with variegated Trusty Rusty coleus, a Zahara zinnia and flashy chartreuse Marguerite trailing sweet-potato vine. Credit: Burpee Home Gardens

whatever I want to design around," she says. "Then I take that plant and put it next to other flowers and see if it gives you a pop."

Mazat loves pink and purple together. She recently designed a combination around a shimmering Persian shield plant (*Strobilanthes*) with purple leaves brushed with silver, adding a celosia, with its pink bottle-brush blooms, and a pretty, dark blue petunia with a white picotee edge. In another pot, she started with a flourish of Purple Majesty millet and paired it with soft lilac petunias and fuzzy-leaf plectranthus (sometimes called Mexican oregano).

The biggest or tallest plant doesn't always go in the middle, Mazat says; it depends on where the pot will be placed. Formal pots might have a tall plant in the center with mounding plants around it, but, by varying where you put the tallest plant, you can have a pot that's a lot more interesting.

Mazat and Hirvela both recommend using large pots (at least 18 inches across, on up to 24 inches) and enough plants so the pots look full right from the start. Hirvela says she usually chooses neutral pots to show off her plants, "but the pot can come first," she says. "I don't think anyone should deny themselves if they see a pot they love and their heart goes pitter-pat."

Whatever container you choose, it should have drainage holes. After that, suit yourself. Mazat likes the fun of old

washtubs and the trim sophistication of wire baskets lined with moss, but she has used inexpensive plastic pots, too. "I did a design for a friend in plastic pots, and I told him 'You won't see the containers in two weeks.'" Cascading, ruffled petunias and silvery dichondra spilled over the sides in no time and the pots disappeared. The flowers bloomed until the first frost.

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## SIDEBAR TIPS FROM THE PROS

There's no single recipe for successful flowerpot combinations, says Joan Mazat, who works with a team of designers on hundreds of pots every year for the display gardens at Ball Horticultural Co. near Chicago. "Choose what you like best," she says. "It's 100 percent subjective."

Here are some tips from Mazat and from Stacey Hirvela of Proven Winners ColorChoice shrubs.

-- Large pots are best. Mazat considers 18- to 24-inch pots the minimum size for annual and perennial plants or small shrubs. Large pots have more room for plants' roots, and they hold more potting soil, which gives roots better access to moisture.

-- Use good-quality potting soil, and fill the pot to the rim. The soil will settle.

-- Plants in pots need fertilizer to thrive. Add a slow-release fertilizer when you plant (organic types are available) and fertilize during the summer, too. "My message on fertilizer is this: 'Please fertilize,'" Mazat says. "Please feed your plants. They are trapped in their containers."

-- Hydrangeas, butterfly bushes and even junipers or other shrubs chosen for their striking foliage texture can all be used "like the backbone in a pot" with petunias or other annual flowers around them, Hirvela says. The shrubs -- or perennial flowers, if you use them -- can remain in the pot for several years, or they can be transplanted into the garden at the end of the season.

-- Snip off flowers as they fade, pinch leaves, trim trailing plants as they grow. "Everybody needs a haircut every once in a while," Mazat says. "I just do it on the fly, picking a bloom here and there. It's easy."

-- For more ideas, try the design tool at [Burpee Home Gardens, gdncoach.mob/mydesigner/](http://BurpeeHomeGardens.gdncoach.mob/mydesigner/). You can look up combinations on the container-plant gallery at Ball Horticultural Co.'s website: [ballhort.com/Retailers/MixedContainerGallery.aspx](http://ballhort.com/Retailers/MixedContainerGallery.aspx), or check the articles and suggested combinations on the Proven Winners website: [provenwinners.com/container-gardening](http://provenwinners.com/container-gardening).

## AN EARLY SPRING BRINGS THE OUTDOORS INTO FOCUS

When it comes to furnishing a home, context is everything. That goes for the outdoors, as well.

Although some disparate decorating styles may co-exist, indeed, quite dramatically, there can't be a total disconnect. Which is why new home-builders today are designing outdoor spaces as an integral part to the overall scheme, not as an amenity to be added later.

At least one catalyst that bolsters the indoor-outdoor connection we've seen underscored in magazines is the National Association of Home Builders' Best in America Living Awards, which last year gave top honors to a town house in Plymouth, Mass. What was so appealing is that the home wrapped around a courtyard with an outdoor fireplace. Heather McCune, former editor of Professional Builder magazine and now marketing director of Bassenian Lagoni Architects in Newport Beach, Calif., told the Chicago Tribune that the judges regarded the recognition as a "sea change in design."

For California-based, award-winning designer Richard Frinier, it's simply an evolution.

"For me, the outdoor room was never really a trend; rather, it is a lifestyle," says Frinier. "People are returning to the pleasure of entertaining at home, which has been fueled not only by resort-at-home trends, but by the many food and cooking shows inspiring people. This means they have to have wonderful indoor and outdoor living spaces to complete the experience."

As outdoor rooms have evolved in the last few years, the most sophisticated spaces now include areas for entertaining, cooking and lounging, with water and fireplace features. Stylish decorating preferred.

At the very least, there must be some consistency, if not compatibility, in scale, palette and finishes.

John Gidding, host of "Curb Appeal" on HGTV, knows more than a thing or two about that. His advice is simple: "One important thing about (house) facades, is to never be trend based," says Gidding, speaking not just about a front exterior, but side and back as well. "Be true to the architecture." Spoken like the Harvard-trained architect he is.

"Keep an eye on the facade and plantscape to create a color story," says Gidding, who advises taking cues from the home's architecture, such as metal finishes -- "the hardware on a door." He also likes to introduce color and shape by integrating planters, especially sculptural ones. He often modifies off-the-rack terra cotta pots for example, with paint.

The latest designs from outdoor furniture and accessories manufacturers feature a wide range of decorative styles, shapes and materials. Wood choices abound, from the ubiquitous teak to rich mahogany,



Besides its clean, crisp lines, this modular sectional sofa, part of the Elements collection designed by Richard Frinier for Brown Jordan, wins multiple style points. Its frame is covered with a handsome, textured mohair fiber Resinweave, complemented with square and rectangular knife-edged pillows. An optional sliding tray provides interest in a contrasting powder-coated aluminum and tonal color. The upholstery is a new Classic Linen designed by Frinier for Sunbrella. One sofa is 64 inches wide by 36 inches deep and 26 inches high. Credit: Brown Jordan

in ranges of finishes that include weathered taupes and grays (tones also are emerging in fabrics) like those that fit the Belgian modern interior looks so popular at Restoration Hardware. Weaves in resin or synthetic wicker lookalikes continue to push the envelope, with herringbone, sweaterlike and open meshes that add intrigue to shape. Metals run the gamut from sleek and shiny or matte stainless steel to oxidized looks and flamboyant brights in powder-coated enamels.

"The addition of accessories such as pillows or throws are an easy way to add a punch of color," says Gina Wicker, creative director for Sunbrella fabrics.

Area rugs also add color and pattern, if you choose, as they also define "rooms." With a rich array of styles (at Pottery Barn this spring, there even are extraordinary outdoor "kilims" hand loomed in typical colors, in stripes and vibrant diamonds, woven in polyester yarns), consumers are loving the no-fuss features, so a good number of rugs designed to withstand sun, dirt, stains and mildew, are now go-to options indoors, especially in high traffic areas and even in formal dining rooms.

Some tend to be a bit more playful with color outdoors, while others stick to neutral comfort zones. But when color is monochromatic, say all blue, green or plum palette that is fairly quiet, the hues almost act as neutrals without a jarring neon orange or lime green. That said, a jolt of color can be fun and even whimsical, as in a baroque style table in acid yellow whose cabriole legs and elaborate carving -- in resin! -- are an unexpected counterpoint to a straight-lined gray sofa at Horchow.

Try, as some do with interiors, teaming a set of colorful chairs around a neutral table. Gloster Furniture demonstrates with its Asta collection. The sling seats on the chairs are interchangeable to suit your mood: from a citron yellow to orange to a blue that could match the sea and window frames on the island of Mykonos, to more subdued neutrals -- 10 shades in all.

Consider mixing materials, such as

wovens with wood or metal, to relieve what could be monotonous all-matching suites. From wicker lookalikes in resin or other synthetic fabrics, some in sophisticated patterns such as herringbone, to lacey open weaves, this category lends texture and even subtle color.

One outdoor trend that's gained traction and is clearly here to stay is modular seating. Just as it has become a popular go-to option indoors -- particularly in family rooms, where extending seating and offering stretch-out options like chaises -- it makes perfect sense.

"Sectional seating continues to grow as a category," says Frinier, "because the pieces are designed to be versatile and flexible. You can change configurations from day to day to fit your plans for a large family gathering or just for everyday living requirements."

living requirements."

With an amazingly warm and early spring in most parts of the country, no doubt that many already have gotten a jump on sprucing up their outdoor spaces. Being outdoors is, for many, re-energizing.

"I like just about everything about relaxing outdoors," says Frinier. "Everything feels fresh and alive. Even if you just sit out five minutes a day, you feel connected to the day. You think about where you've been and where you want to be."

Sources

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# BUILD GREEN

A “green” home in the 21st century doesn’t mean having a special place for growing plants or decorating in shades of avocado and sage.

Green building is the construction or renovation of homes in a way that conserves natural resources. Building houses with an environmentally friendly focus started in the 1970s and is a movement gaining momentum in the construction industry, says Nate Kredich, vice president of residential marketing with the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) in Washington, D.C.

“Potential buyers and homeowners are more discerning and educated regarding the sustainability of resources,” he says. “The building green philosophy can save the homeowner more money on energy bills, create a healthier home and help conserve natural resources.”

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification program, or LEED, was started in 2008 by the USGBC. It provides an independent, third-party verification that a home was built using strategies aimed at achieving high performance in environmental benchmarks.

Since the program’s inception four years ago, LEED has certified 16,000 homes across the country. Kredich says the number of LEED-certified homes has been growing by about 25 percent every year. Last year, 7,000 new construction projects were LEED-certified, while 50,000 buildings have applied for certification upon building completion.

Josh Wynne, owner of Josh Wynne Construction in Sarasota, Fla., bristles at the mention of “green building” and says too often the terminology is tossed around as a marketing ploy or gimmick. “Green building isn’t a style, a counter-top or a brand, it’s a concept that should define good building,” he says. “I’ve been in business since 1998 and build homes that make sense for the homeowner, while conserving and utilizing natural resources as much as possible. To me, it’s just common sense building.”

Last year, Wynne completed building a contemporary “Florida Cracker” architecturally designed home in Lakewood Ranch, Fla. Called Power Haus, it received a platinum LEED designation for its construction and energy efficiency.

“Even before breaking ground, we surveyed the site to take advantage of not only the expansive views, but also the natural ventilation and lighting provided by the breeze and shade of 162 trees on this hardwood swamp,” Wynne says. “The idea was to bring as much of the outdoors inside the house.”

The house was situated to catch and take advantage of the westerly winds emanating from the Gulf of Mexico. To aid in the natural ventilation of the house, it is equipped with ceiling fans, including a commercial one that spans



HT: The great room of the Power Haus in Lakewood Ranch, Fla., (receiving a platinum LEED designation for its construction and energy efficiency), features an open, functional design that opens up into the kitchen and backyard. To aid in the natural ventilation of the house, it is equipped with a commercial ceiling fan that spans eight-feet in diameter over the great room with large expanses of operable doors and windows that lead outside. CREDIT: Matt McCourtney, McCourtney Photographics

eight feet in diameter over the great room. Power Haus has large expanses of operable windows and doors to the outside. The open floor plan includes indoor accordion doors, which allow the breeze to blow through this 3,200 square-foot home, built on a four-square design with a breezeway.

Large four-foot eaves were built to provide protection from the Florida sun, while rainwater is captured from the roof area and feeds a cistern for future use. Solar panels export more kilowatt-hours to the electrical grid than are used by the house.

Inside, polished concrete floors, clay walls over mold-resistant drywall and Forest Stewardship Council-certified native cypress timbers were used for doors, trim, cabinets and roof framing. Cabinet doors in the kitchen were fabricated from lumber scraps, including plantation teak, mahogany, birds-eye maple and alder woods.

But, building green doesn’t have to be an all-or-nothing endeavor, Wynne says. “Building this way is more about being responsible stewards of resources and creating a comfortable, livable home.”

Having a home LEED-certified is an independent verification of a home’s design that conserves natural resources and is based on a number of criteria including:

-- Sustainable Site Conservation -- Land planning and design techniques preserve the natural environment, reduce erosion and protect vegetation, especially trees.

-- Water Efficiency -- Water reduction is typically achieved through the use of water-efficient appliances, rainwater collection systems and an outdoor land-

scaping that utilizes native plants.

-- Energy Use -- This includes a variety of energy-wise strategies including an efficient design and construction; energy-efficient appliances, systems and lighting; insulation; and the use of renewable and clean sources of energy, such as solar power.

-- Material Selection -- The choice of construction materials is based on durability, product sustainability, the reduction of waste, as well as recycling efforts.

-- Indoor Environmental Quality -- Installation of home ventilation and filtration systems reduce the possibility of mold and allergens inside a home. Design that improves natural lighting and acoustics also make a home more livable and aesthetically pleasing.

-- Awareness and Education -- A concerted effort to reduce waste and recycle natural materials happens during the construction phase, and is continued when people inhabit the house.

Wynne says a responsible building project should have a holistic, integrated approach to design and the construction process. Before potential homeowners break ground, they should detail their priorities in terms of energy efficiency, while keeping in mind any budgetary or timeline constraints.

“Green is a color, not a standard of measurement in building practices,” he says. “What may -- but not necessarily -- cost a little more on the front end to build in terms of sustainability and conservation, has the potential to save homeowners money on energy bills, have less maintenance costs and create a comfortable home.”

# MODERNISM FOR THE 99 PERCENT

There's an expression in politics that one campaigns in poetry but must ultimately govern in prose. That is to say, words and lofty ideas are easily generated, but making a society that actually works in practice is the hard part.

Soaring rhetoric about the destiny of a people or a nation must necessarily give way to nuts-and-bolts pragmatism that collects the garbage, keeps water, traffic and sewage flowing, and lets citizens go about their everyday lives with a reasonable balance of freedom and security.

The same might be said of architecture -- that one designs in poetry but must build in prose. This is particularly true when an abstract cultural or aesthetic philosophy encounters the gritty realities of construction, the limitations of materials and finite budgets, and the "mundane" needs of the building's occupants. This encounter between abstraction and everyday living lies at the heart of "The New Modern House: Redefining Functionalism" by Jonathan Bell and Ellie Stathaki.

While the book's tone and subject matter tend at first toward the academic, its focus ultimately bends more toward the 50 actual homes the authors have chosen as examples of this new functionalism. Their gripe isn't with modernism per se, but rather how somewhere along the way the movement got hijacked by self-proclaimed sophisticates, practitioners who indulged what Bell and Stathaki call a "superficial fascination with novelty."

Architects and designers aiming for innovation or improvement is a given and a good, but if they single-mindedly pursue abstract notions about pure forms or spaces, they risk severing the necessary connection to everyday life.

That rift, the authors contend, is where modernism went wrong, and the ease with which digital technology can be used to create virtual (but sometimes un-buildable) designs has only made things worse. Both make the process and the product seem anti-septic and effortless, and they encourage editing of untidy elements that



A dramatic glass and aluminum corner and the rich warm tones of natural wood siding on this Massachusetts home belie its considerable salvage content (300 tons of recycled steel beams and concrete from Boston's Big Dig infrastructure project). Credit: Single Speed Design

might muddy the aesthetic waters with the grime of actual life.

Domestic architecture, they insist, is "the realm of things, a constructed space specific to individual lives." Mass, line, texture -- all good things to include, as long as you don't forget things such as comfort, sunshine and the fact that sometimes people have to go to the bathroom.

Bell and Stathaki do not argue for functional utility only, or for clinging to traditional elements of residential design out of habit or nostalgia. The simplicity and directness of modernism is fine, but homes are not just machines for living. They are "experiential" places, capable of evoking moods and atmosphere and all of the visceral responses that humans associate with shelter. And they have to serve people of all stripes, not just the wealthy or some theoretical "no kids, no pets, no mess" crowd that seems the intended audience for the starker examples of modernist houses.

So, make your way through this heady introductory discussion and you land at the book's simple center, a compilation of international "case studies" that looks at three environments for the new modernist home:

-- Rural -- Just as some modernist design elements are iconic, so are some modernist settings, though you might not think of open countryside as one of them. But barns, grain silos and chicken coops are great examples of a no-frills approach to building design. Unfortunately, the open landscape context has for decades been linked to the exclusivity of modernist

home design, because it suggested only well-heeled clientele with the means to afford trendy architects and plenty of well-situated land. Some of the homes featured here do enjoy spectacular settings, but most are not particularly upscale.

-- Suburban --

Here, the concern is avoiding the convention and conformity common to suburban developments. The featured homes employ "common" materials such as wood-plank siding, metal roofing and gray concrete block, but just as many bolder choices -- walls of loose rock held captive in rectangular

wire mesh "blocks," corrugated fiberglass and compressed-straw panels that create super-insulated walls. One Massachusetts home contains steel and concrete recycled from Boston's Big Dig roadway project.

-- Urban -- Urban settings can involve a host of challenges, from small infill lots, sloped or terraced terrain, and the historical context of surrounding homes and neighborhoods. Brick, steel and glass are favorite materials, not surprisingly, and many of these homes must pack a good deal of efficiency into a modest amount of square footage.

The diverse lineup of home designs, materials, and settings makes for an informative and interesting read, but one of the book's best features is its added focus on the process of architecture and the adventures of some owner/builders.

In addition to the usual images of finished homes, the reader sees rough concept sketches, crude mockups, highly detailed scale models and in-progress construction photos for many of the featured homes. These serve as additional reminders of the physical reality of our shelters, and of the lives we spend in and with them.

Book Information

"The New Modern House: Redefining Functionalism" by Jonathan Bell and Ellie Stathaki; Laurence King Publishing/Chronicle Books; \$50, hardcover; 800-759-0190; [www.laurenceking.com](http://www.laurenceking.com)