

A GARDENING LATEST GUIDE

11 Thanksgiving Porch Planter Ideas

A welcoming entrance, one container at a time



11 distinct designs | Plant lists | Step-by-step assembly

Practical ideas for modest homes and real November weather



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Choose your porch display

Eleven different combinations, sized for ordinary home entrances.

A welcoming porch starts with plants that suit the light and weather outside your own door. Use this table to pick a design, then turn to its photo and shopping list. The following page covers the shared preparation steps that help every container drain well and sit securely.

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Every plant list makes one container. For a matching pair, double the quantities. Times are estimates for assembly and exclude shopping, preparing drainage holes and gathering cuttings.

BEFORE YOU BUY

Plant hardiness in the ground does not guarantee survival in an exposed container. Use the local forecast and the plant label, and make a plan for protection before a hard freeze.

Set up for success

Choose the right spot, prepare the container and give roots room.

Build living displays while the potting mix is unfrozen. Start with healthy nursery plants close to the size you want for Thanksgiving, since late-season growth can be slow. These are seasonal arrangements. Move growing perennials and large leafy plants into roomier positions when the display ends.

READ THE NOVEMBER WEATHER

In mild areas, flowers can continue as nights cool. Where light frosts occur, use acclimated cool-season plants and protect them from harder cold. With repeated freezes, consider the cut-material urn on page 24. Frost-free cyclamen needs a different plan from hardy-looking cabbage. [S01, S02, S04, S11]

CHECK THE ACTUAL PORCH LIGHT

Watch where sun falls beneath the roof. A spot beside the door can be much darker than the garden. Choose morning-sun foliage plants for part shade and reserve the succulent bowl for an open sunny position. Shade alone is not frost protection.

GATHER THE BASIC KIT

Bring gloves, a trowel, watering can, clean snips, a bucket, a small ground sheet and pot feet. Use soft ties and short bamboo supports for branches. If a container needs drilling, follow the pot maker's advice for its material and smooth the finished edges.

USE THE REAL POT VOLUME

Listed measurements are approximate external dimensions. Check usable planting depth and the manufacturer's capacity before buying mix. Bag allowances include spare mix and are not exact fill volumes. Root balls must fit with gaps between them, without being crushed.

GIVE WATER A WAY OUT

Choose containers with open drain holes. Use container potting mix rather than garden soil, and leave about 1 in / 2.5 cm below the rim for watering. Skip a gravel layer underneath: it does not improve drainage. Keep decorative outer pots from holding water. [S03]

CHOOSE COLOR AND PLANT SIZE

Buy established plants with sound roots, healthy leaves and no obvious pests. Cabbage and kale centers often color more strongly below about 50 F / 10 C. Pansies may survive cold while flowering less. Use fewer plants when the nursery stock is larger than the recipe suggests. [S01, S02]

A CLEAR ENTRANCE IS PART OF THE DESIGN

Keep door swings, steps and handrails clear. Stand heavy pots in their final position before filling them. Put whole pumpkins beside plants rather than on their leaves, and support branches so wind cannot loosen them.

Plant notes: S01, S02, S03, S04 | Source details on page 27.

01

The classic harvest pot

Cream cabbage, golden pansies and bare branches



A broad cabbage rosette gives this familiar harvest display its shape. Yellow flowers bring warmth to a brick or stone entrance, while a few open branches add height without hiding the plants. Keep the pumpkin on the paving so the leaves have room.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 1 ornamental cabbage with a cream center, in a 6 in / 15 cm pot
- 4 golden yellow pansies, in 3-4 in / 9-10 cm pots
- 3 forked bare branches, about 24-30 in / 60-75 cm long
- 1 small orange pumpkin, 3 low pot feet, a short cane and soft ties

Container: Round pot, 22 in wide x 12 in deep (56 x 30 cm). Choose a frost-rated terracotta-look pot where nights freeze.

POSITION

Sun to part sun. Aim for 4-6 hours of direct light.

WEATHER

Cool days and occasional light frost. Protect during hard freezes.

ASSEMBLY

35-45 minutes

Make this planter

01 / The classic harvest pot

Have 40-50 L of container mix available. Use the shared preparation advice on page 3.

1 Set the pot in place

Stand the empty pot on low feet beside the door. Check that all drain holes are open. Add damp container mix until the cabbage root ball can sit with its original soil line about 1 in / 2.5 cm below the rim.

2 Position the cabbage

Slide the cabbage out of its nursery pot, supporting the root ball. Loosen only roots circling its outside. Set it just behind the center, with its best leaves facing the approach. Keep the growing crown above the mix.

3 Fit the pansies

Place two pansies near the front and one at each side. Leave small gaps between root balls and keep the cabbage leaves from burying the flowers. If your plants are larger, omit a pansy rather than crush the roots.

4 Fill and settle

Add mix around the roots and press with your fingertips to close large gaps. Keep every plant at its nursery depth. Water at soil level until water leaves the drain holes, then allow the pot to drain.

5 Add open branches

Insert each branch 6-8 in / 15-20 cm into a clear space behind the root balls. Keep exposed height around 18-24 in / 45-60 cm. Tie stems to a short support cane if they rock, or shorten them.

6 Finish the entrance

Place the pumpkin beside the pot, away from the drainage outlet. Turn the container a little if needed, then check the view from the path. Open the door fully and make sure branches cannot catch visitors.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Check the mix before watering and remove spent pansy flowers. A sheltered porch can stay dry through a rainy week. Buy cabbage with good color now. Cool weather often strengthens the centers, but the response varies by variety.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Keep sound plants while they look good. Compost healthy annual material when finished, remove all ties and store the branches dry. Keep pumpkins off damp leaves and replace them at the first soft spot.

A USEFUL DETAIL

For two matching pots, double the list. Make each arrangement face the approach rather than copying the branch positions exactly.

02

The plum-and-cream urn

Purple kale and pale violas beside a dark door



Dark foliage and small cream flowers give a quiet entrance plenty to look at. A charcoal urn adds height without requiring tall plants. Choose a wide bowl on a stable base, then use pale branches to echo the flowers.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 1 purple ornamental kale, in a 6 in / 15 cm pot
- 5 cream violas, in 3 in / 9 cm pots
- 3 naturally pale bare branches, 24-30 in / 60-75 cm long
- 1 cream pumpkin, a short support cane and soft ties

Container: Wide charcoal urn with a 22 in / 56 cm planting bowl, at least 10 in / 25 cm deep, on a broad base.

POSITION

Sun or bright part sun, with shelter from strong wind.

WEATHER

Cool weather and light frost. Flower quality may decline in stronger cold.

ASSEMBLY

35-45 minutes

Make this planter

02 / The plum-and-cream urn

Have 30-40 L of container mix available. Use the shared preparation advice on page 3.

1 Check the urn

Set it on firm, level paving. Press against the rim to check for wobble. Make sure the planting bowl drains through the base. An urn with a sealed pedestal needs a drainage route before planting.

2 Build the planting level

Add damp mix to bring the kale to its original depth, leaving 1 in / 2.5 cm below the rim for watering. Position it toward the back so its purple center faces forward.

3 Place the cream flowers

Arrange three violas along the front and one on either side of the kale. Angle foliage away from the central crown. Use fewer plants if their roots cannot fit without being squeezed.

4 Plant and water

Remove nursery pots, tease out tightly circling roots and fill the gaps with mix. Keep crowns visible. Water the mix slowly, pause if it pools and let the urn drain before moving any decorations into place.

5 Secure the pale branches

Push branch ends into clear spaces at the back, away from the kale root ball. Tie them below the foliage to a short support cane. Keep their outline open and shorten any stem that makes the urn top-heavy.

6 Repeat one pale accent

Set the cream pumpkin at the base on the side away from the passage. If adding a second pot, repeat the cream flower color in it. Keep door handles, lights and the door swing free.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Remove damaged outer kale leaves without stripping the plant. Pinch off faded viola flowers. Shelter the whole container or use a locally suitable plant cover before severe cold. Never rely on an in-ground hardiness claim for exposed pot roots.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Remove the pumpkin after the holiday and keep the pale branches if the living plants remain sound. In a mild climate, the urn can carry on as a winter container with the same care.

A USEFUL DETAIL

Cream violas have smaller flowers than many pansies. Either can work, but keep the chosen flower color consistent.

Plant notes: S01, S02, S04 | Source details on page 27.

03

The garden-cuttings barrel

Dried hydrangeas, cabbage and purple pansies



Papery hydrangeas and worn wood make this display feel at home on a covered porch. Living foliage keeps it fresh, while the dried stems supply height. Use a sheltered position so the flower heads stay out of repeated rain.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 1 cream-centered ornamental cabbage, 6 in / 15 cm pot
- 3 purple pansies, 4 in / 10 cm pots
- 3 dry hydrangea heads on stems and 4 bare twigs
- 3 pinecones, 3 short bamboo stakes, florist wire and 1 orange pumpkin

Container: Clean half-barrel planter, about 26 in wide x 16 in deep (66 x 41 cm), with open drain holes.

POSITION

Bright porch with part sun. Roof shelter for dried flowers.

WEATHER

Cool weather with light frost. Protect live plants during harder freezes.

ASSEMBLY

45-60 minutes

Make this planter

03 / The garden-cuttings barrel

Have 80-100 L of mix available. Barrel volumes vary. Use the shared preparation advice on page 3.

1 Prepare the barrel

Use a sound garden planter with no loose staves or sharp bands. Place it on low supports so the base can drain. Fill with damp potting mix, leaving room for the plant roots and a watering margin.

2 Set the living anchor

Position the cabbage in the front-left half with its crown above the mix. Place the three pansies in an arc through the front-right half. Keep open spaces behind them for the decorative stems.

3 Plant the root balls

Remove pots and plant at the same depth as before. Fill between roots, firm gently and water until the barrel drains. Do this before adding the dry flower heads so they do not get wet.

4 Arrange the dried stems

Trim hydrangea stems to three slightly different heights. Insert them behind the cabbage, clear of its roots. Support fragile stems with slim bamboo stakes and discreet ties. Let the cabbage center remain visible.

5 Add twigs and cones

Insert bare twigs behind the hydrangeas. Wire each pinecone to a short stake, turn sharp wire ends inward and place the cones just above the mix at the front. Do not blanket the soil or cover crowns.

6 Finish under shelter

Put the pumpkin beside the barrel and check that no stems brush the doorway. Trim any twig reaching into the path. Keep a hand-width opening between decorations so a watering-can spout can reach the mix.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Water at soil level and keep the dried heads out of rain. Remove any cut material that softens or develops mold. Tighten support ties after wind and replace damaged pansies rather than hiding them beneath extra decorations.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Store sound dried stems in a dry place or compost plain plant material. Remove wires before composting. Keep the barrel for a later seasonal display, or empty it when dry if the wood needs maintenance.

A USEFUL DETAIL

Use cuttings from plants you own or have permission to trim. A few firm hydrangea heads work better than a large bundle of fragile ones.

Plant notes: S01, S02, S03 | Source details on page 27.

04

The kitchen-garden trough

Ruby chard, curly parsley and amber violas



Red chard stems bring a harvest color that lasts even when flowers are scarce. Curly parsley softens the sides and amber violas sit near the rim. This is a short seasonal display with an option to harvest the food-grown leaves.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 1 compact ruby-stemmed Swiss chard, 4-6 in / 10-15 cm pot
- 2 curly parsley plants, 4 in / 10 cm pots
- 3 amber violas, 3 in / 9 cm pots
- 1 small orange pumpkin, plus clean snips if harvesting

Container: Cedar trough, about 30 x 14 x 14 in (76 x 36 x 36 cm), with drainage and short feet.

POSITION

A bright entrance with around 6 hours of sun.

WEATHER

Cool, mild November conditions. Shelter before hard frost.

ASSEMBLY

40-50 minutes

Make this planter

04 / The kitchen-garden trough

Have 50-60 L of container mix available. Use the shared preparation advice on page 3.

1 Choose the right stock

Buy established chard and parsley sold for food use if you want to harvest them. Check leaf undersides before buying. Choose a compact chard plant with good red stems rather than a tall, stretched specimen.

2 Prepare the trough

Set it beside the door on firm paving. Check drainage and fill with damp mix, allowing for the root balls. If using a liner, its openings must match the trough drainage so water cannot collect inside.

3 Place the chard

Set the chard near the rear center at its nursery depth. Allow room for the leaves to open without touching the door. Turn the plant until several colored stems face the viewing side.

4 Add parsley and violas

Place parsley at each side and three violas along the front. Keep the crowns apart and use only plants whose roots fit the available space. Parsley can stay in removable inner pots if you prefer to lift it later.

5 Water and check access

Fill around the roots, keep a watering margin below the rim and water through. Make sure the mix around every root ball becomes damp. Leave the trough where it can drain without wetting the threshold.

6 Add the harvest accent

Place the pumpkin beside the trough, clear of leaves and drainage. Snip only a few outer parsley stems or chard leaves if harvesting. Keep enough foliage for the display and wash harvested leaves before kitchen use.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Keep the mix evenly moist without leaving it saturated. Check removable pots separately. Treat the violas as decoration unless their food-use history is known. The trough is a temporary mixed planting, so give the chard and parsley more room as they grow.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Move usable herbs and vegetables into roomier pots or the garden when local conditions suit transplanting. If hard weather arrives first, move manageable pots into a bright sheltered space that suits those plants.

A USEFUL DETAIL

A nursery ornamental is not automatically a food crop. Use the plant label and treatment history to decide what can go into the kitchen.

Plant notes: S05, S06, S02 | Source details on page 27.

05

The narrow-doorstep trough

Burgundy mustard, white alyssum and violet violas



Upright mustard leaves give a narrow container height without a bundle of branches. Small white flowers brighten the rim and violet violas bring a second color. This trough sits alongside the doorway and leaves the approach open.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 1 young burgundy mustard, such as Red Giant, 4 in / 10 cm pot
- 2 compact white sweet alyssum plants, 3 in / 9 cm pots
- 2 violet violas, 3 in / 9 cm pots
- 1 small cream pumpkin, only if it fits beside the wall

Container: Galvanized garden trough, about 28 x 12 x 12 in (71 x 30 x 30 cm), with smooth edges and drain holes.

POSITION

Sun to part sun. Avoid a hot, reflected-sun corner.

WEATHER

Mild to cool November weather. Use as a short display before hard freezes.

ASSEMBLY

35-45 minutes

Make this planter

05 / The narrow-doorstep trough

Have 30-40 L of container mix available. Use the shared preparation advice on page 3.

1 Check the doorway

Place the empty trough against the wall and open the door fully. Walk past carrying a bag. Shift the container until the threshold and walking route remain clear, including room for the plants to spread a little.

2 Prepare the metal pot

Use a container sold for planting or have drainage holes added with suitable metal tools. Deburr drilled edges and clear away swarf. Place the trough on low feet, then add damp container mix.

3 Position the mustard

Plant the young mustard toward the rear center at its original depth. Its upright leaves form the tallest part. Leave space around its crown and do not bend leaves against the wall.

4 Fill the lower edge

Plant one alyssum toward each front corner and the violas between them. Use compact nursery plants and keep foliage within the trough width. Fill gaps between roots without piling soil onto the stems.

5 Settle the planting

Water slowly until the drainage holes run, then let the trough drain. Check that the metal base is not sitting in a puddle. Move the small pumpkin beside the far end only if it stays outside the passage.

6 Make the final width check

View the container with the door open and closed. Trim only damaged foliage. If a plant already sticks into the route, remove that plant or use a wider position rather than forcing it against its neighbors.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Mustard can grow much larger than its nursery size, so treat this as a short seasonal grouping. Watch flower quality as nights cool. Thin the arrangement when leaves overlap heavily and move the mustard to a larger pot if keeping it.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Replant sound annuals where local temperatures allow. Move the mustard into a roomier container. Empty the trough after the season if its finish or manufacturer guidance calls for dry winter storage.

A USEFUL DETAIL

In regions where sweet alyssum is discouraged or invasive, replace the two alyssum plants with two white violas.

Plant notes: S07, S08, S02 | Source details on page 27.

06

The blue bowl of autumn foliage

Striped sedge, burgundy coral bells and lavender violas



Fine striped leaves arch above broad burgundy foliage in this low bowl. Lavender flowers sit at the front, where they remain visible. The deep blue container adds a color change without requiring a large porch or a tall arrangement.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 1 *Carex oshimensis* Evergold sedge, 4-5 in / 10-12 cm pot
- 2 burgundy heucheras, such as Plum Pudding, 4 in / 10 cm pots
- 3 pale lavender violas, 3 in / 9 cm pots
- 1 small muted green pumpkin and low pot feet

Container: Deep blue glazed bowl, about 22 in wide x 12 in deep (56 x 30 cm), with drain holes and low feet.

POSITION

Morning sun and afternoon shade, or bright part shade.

WEATHER

Mild to cool conditions. Check local hardiness of the chosen perennials.

ASSEMBLY

35-45 minutes

Make this planter

06 / The blue bowl of autumn foliage

Have 35-45 L of container mix available. Use the shared preparation advice on page 3.

1 Prepare the bowl

Use a frost-rated glazed pot if freezing weather is possible. Set it on feet and check drainage. Add damp mix to support the root balls while leaving 1 in / 2.5 cm below the rim for watering.

2 Place the sedge

Set the sedge at the rear center. Fan its leaves with your hand so they arch over open space rather than into the doorway. Keep the sedge crown at the same level as in its nursery pot.

3 Add broad foliage

Place one heuchera on either side, a little forward of the sedge. Keep their crowns above the mix. Turn the plants until their best leaves face outward and each plant has room for its root ball.

4 Plant the flower edge

Fit three small violas along the front without covering their crowns with heuchera leaves. If the nursery stock is large, use two violas. Fill around the roots and settle the mix with gentle fingertip pressure.

5 Water and position

Water at the soil surface until the pot drains. Set the bowl where it receives morning light but avoids strong afternoon heat. Keep the pumpkin beside the pot, not among the low leaves.

6 Check the lower view

Crouch to see the arrangement from path level. Shorten only damaged sedge blades and remove old leaves that hide flowers. Turn the pot rather than tying the grass-like foliage into an unnatural upright bunch.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Keep the mix moist but well drained. Heuchera and sedge hardiness varies by selection and container exposure. Choose local nursery recommendations, protect roots in severe cold and avoid assuming the foliage will stay perfect all winter.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Give the sedge and heucheras their own space in larger pots or suitable garden positions. They are perennial plants, but these small nursery specimens will eventually outgrow the shared bowl.

A USEFUL DETAIL

If this spot is too shaded for good viola flowering, use the sedge and heucheras alone and leave wider gaps for growth.

Plant notes: S09, S10, S02 | Source details on page 27.

07

The sheltered cyclamen basket

Pink and white cyclamen with a soft fern backdrop



A woven basket gives a covered entrance a softer look. Here it acts as a dry decorative sleeve around removable nursery pots. The flowers need a cool, frost-free setting, so this design suits mild regions or short displays that can be carried under cover.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 3 florist cyclamen (*Cyclamen persicum*), 4 in / 10 cm pots: 2 pink and 1 white
- 1 small soft shield fern (*Polystichum setiferum*), 5-6 in / 12-15 cm pot
- Rigid inner tray, short pot risers and a small pale orange pumpkin
- Optional few loose pine-bark pieces to hide visible inner-pot rims

Container: Willow basket about 22 in / 56 cm across, with a rigid removable inner tray and space for four nursery pots.

POSITION

Bright indirect light or gentle morning sun under a porch roof.

WEATHER

Frost-free only. Florist cyclamen is not hardy outdoor cyclamen.

ASSEMBLY

25-35 minutes

Make this planter

07 / The sheltered cyclamen basket

No bulk filling. Keep plants in their separate drained pots. Use the shared preparation advice on page 3.

1 Make a dry outer sleeve

Choose a basket with a firm, level base. Set a rigid tray inside it to protect the wicker. Place short stable risers in the tray so nursery pots never sit in any accidental collected water.

2 Keep the plants separate

Leave all four plants in pots with working drain holes. Do not plant directly into the basket or seal the roots in a plastic bag. Check that each pot can be lifted out without pulling its neighbors.

3 Build the fern backdrop

Set the fern at the rear. Raise its pot slightly if needed with a stable riser, keeping its base secure. Allow fronds to spread behind the flowers rather than folding them against the door.

4 Fit the cyclamen

Place pink cyclamen at the two sides and white at the front. Keep the tops of the tubers and growing crowns exposed at their original levels. Turn pots until the flower clusters face outward.

5 Tidy the visible rims

Hide a visible pot edge with a few loose bark pieces between pots, never over a cyclamen crown. Place the pumpkin outside the basket. Keep the woven sides sheltered from rain and wet paving.

6 Water away from the basket

Lift each pot out for watering, avoiding the cyclamen crown. Let water drain completely before replacing it. Empty the tray after any spill. Carry the arrangement into cool bright shelter before frost is forecast.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Check each pot separately: fern mix should stay lightly moist, while cyclamen should be watered when its surface begins to dry. Keep the basket dry. Cyclamen is harmful if chewed, so place it where pets and young children cannot reach it.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Keep cyclamen in a cool, bright frost-free position and remove faded flower stems. Move the fern into a suitable larger pot or garden spot. The basket can be stored dry for another season.

A USEFUL DETAIL

Choose cyclamen already in flower for a November display. Do not substitute a frost-tender plant into another recipe without changing its weather plan.

Plant notes: S11, S12 | Source details on page 27.

08

The bronze-and-silver bowl

Garden mums, dusty miller and dark pansies



Bronze flowers and silver leaves stand out against plain brick. This low container keeps the whole arrangement in view, with a modest flowering mum at the back and dark pansies near the rim. Choose a mum with both open flowers and buds.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 1 compact bronze garden mum, 6 in / 15 cm pot
- 2 silver dusty miller plants, 4 in / 10 cm pots
- 3 dark purple pansies, 3-4 in / 9-10 cm pots
- 1 orange pumpkin and low pot feet

Container: Low concrete or concrete-look bowl, about 24 in wide x 14 in deep (61 x 36 cm), with drainage.

POSITION

Sunny porch with around 6 hours of direct light.

WEATHER

Mild to cool days. Protect the flowers from hard frost.

ASSEMBLY

35-45 minutes

Make this planter

08 / The bronze-and-silver bowl

Have 60-75 L of container mix available. Use the shared preparation advice on page 3.

1 Choose a modest mum

Pick a compact plant with healthy foliage and unopened buds among its flowers. Avoid an oversized florist dome that would smother the companions. Check that its root ball fits with room for the other plants.

2 Position the heavy bowl

Place the empty planter on firm paving before adding mix. Keep the drain outlets clear with low feet. Add damp potting mix until the mum will sit at its original depth below the watering margin.

3 Plant the bronze center

Set the mum toward the back center. Loosen circling roots without breaking the root ball apart. Keep the stems at their previous soil level and turn the best flower cluster toward the approach.

4 Add the silver sides

Plant one dusty miller on each side of the mum. Set the three pansies across the front. Keep root balls and crowns separate, and remove a companion if the actual nursery plants are too large to fit.

5 Fill and water through

Fill gaps with mix and firm gently. Water at soil level, let the bowl drain and check that no root ball has sunk. Lift and reset any plant whose crown is now below the surrounding surface.

6 Finish with one pumpkin

Set the pumpkin beside the bowl on the side away from the passage. Check that silver leaves do not hide the pansy flowers. Turn the container before trimming healthy plants to force a fit.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Keep the mix moist enough for the mum while allowing it to drain. Avoid soaking foliage late in the day. Remove spent flowers and shelter the display before severe frost. A potted garden mum is not a promise of winter survival.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Keep any healthy plants that suit your local winter conditions. If you want the mum as a garden perennial, ask a local nursery about the cultivar and timing. Planting it just before hard winter weather gives little time for root growth.

A USEFUL DETAIL

For a longer display, buy a plant with some buds still closed. A mum already past peak flowering will not regain its original full show.

Plant notes: S13, S14, S02 | Source details on page 27.

09

The small evergreen welcome

Dwarf spruce, caramel coral bells and white violas



A small evergreen gives this planter a shape that remains after Thanksgiving. Caramel leaves bring autumn color near the base and white violas brighten the front. Start with a young conifer, then plan for the tree to have more space later.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 1 young dwarf Alberta spruce (Conica), 1 gal / 3-4 L nursery pot
- 1 caramel-colored heuchera, 4 in / 10 cm pot
- 3 white violas, 3 in / 9 cm pots
- 1 cream pumpkin and low pot feet

Container: Cedar cube about 20 x 20 x 20 in (51 x 51 x 51 cm), with drainage and low feet.

POSITION

Sun to part sun in a cool position away from drying wind.

WEATHER

Cool-climate option. Match the conifer and heuchera to local hardiness.

ASSEMBLY

40-55 minutes

Make this planter

09 / The small evergreen welcome

Have 65-80 L of container mix available. Use the shared preparation advice on page 3.

1 Choose the young tree

Select a nursery-grown dwarf spruce around 18-24 in / 45-60 cm above its pot. Choose healthy green needles and an intact root ball. Read the label for mature size and local growing conditions before buying.

2 Prepare the cube

Place the empty box on feet beside the entrance. Open all drainage outlets and add damp mix. Allow enough depth for the spruce root ball without burying the place where its trunk meets the roots.

3 Set the evergreen

Slide the tree from its pot and loosen circling outer roots. Position it at the rear center, upright when viewed from both sides. Keep its root-ball surface at the same level as in the nursery pot.

4 Add the lower plants

Plant the caramel heuchera toward the front-left and three white violas across the remaining front and right side. Leave a small clear area around the spruce trunk. Do not raise mix over the heuchera crown.

5 Settle and drain

Fill gaps, firm with your hands and water until the whole planting drains. Check the spruce remains upright. Add a little mix only where it has settled between plants, keeping every crown and trunk base clear.

6 Finish the doorway

Put the cream pumpkin beside the cube. Keep the evergreen away from a hot wall or a strong wind channel. Do not hang heavy ornaments on the young branches or fix the plant to the house.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Check moisture through winter whenever the mix is unfrozen. Evergreen needles still lose water. Give the root zone suitable winter protection, and remember that a ground-hardy tree can suffer in an exposed pot. In hot regions, ask for a locally suitable dwarf conifer instead.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Remove the pumpkin and keep the living display if conditions allow. Plan to transplant or repot the spruce at a suitable local season. Dwarf Alberta spruce grows slowly, but it does not remain this size forever.

A USEFUL DETAIL

The cube must be wide enough for every root ball. Use a small nursery tree and skip a companion plant if space is tight.

Plant notes: S15, S09, S04 | Source details on page 27.

10

The sunny succulent bowl

Hardy rosettes and red-green stonecrop



A low bowl of pointed rosettes gives a sunny doorstep a different sort of autumn color. The plants sit among pale grit, with a pumpkin beside the bowl. This foliage display suits a bright position protected from prolonged winter wet.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 7 small rooted *Sempervivum* clumps, in 2-3 in / 5-7 cm pots
- 3 small rooted *Sedum album* clumps, with red-green foliage, in 2 in / 5 cm pots
- Clean angular horticultural grit for a thin surface dressing
- 1 small orange pumpkin and low pot feet

Container: Frost-rated terracotta or terracotta-look alpine bowl, about 18 in wide x 8 in deep (46 x 20 cm).

POSITION

An open sunny porch edge with good air movement.

WEATHER

Choose locally hardy plants. Protect from persistent wet and severe exposure.

ASSEMBLY

30-40 minutes

Make this planter

10 / The sunny succulent bowl

Have 15-20 L of free-draining alpine mix plus 1-2 L of grit. Use the shared preparation advice on page 3.

1 Choose hardy stock

Buy plants labeled *Sempervivum* and a locally hardy stonecrop such as *Sedum album*. Do not assume that every rosette sold as a succulent tolerates frost. Use rooted plants for an autumn display rather than fresh unrooted offsets.

2 Prepare fast drainage

Check the bowl has open drain holes and stand it on feet. Add a ready-made alpine or free-draining cactus mix suited to outdoor use. Do not add a gravel layer beneath the mix.

3 Lay out the rosettes

Arrange the seven clumps across the surface at different angles, leaving some visible mix between groups. Keep the largest toward the middle and smaller clumps near the sides. Preserve room for the three stonecrop plants.

4 Plant at the old level

Remove the nursery pots and set each root ball at its previous depth. Keep every rosette base above the surrounding mix. Plant stonecrop in three small gaps near the rim without letting it cover the rosettes.

5 Add a thin grit finish

Spread about 1/4 in / 5 mm of clean grit over exposed mix, keeping it away from the crowns. This is a surface dressing, not a drainage layer. Brush loose grains from the leaves.

6 Place and settle

Set the bowl in a sunny, sheltered position. If the roots and mix are dry, give a light settling drink on a mild day and let it drain. Keep the pumpkin outside the bowl and leave the foliage open to light.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Avoid routine weekly watering in cold weather. Check the mix and local conditions, and keep prolonged rain from soaking the bowl. Cold-hardy succulents can still rot in wet conditions. *Sedum* color and winter leaf cover vary by selection and climate.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Keep the bowl as a year-round foliage display where suitable. Divide crowded offsets or repot in spring. Replace any decayed plant and check drainage before adding new stock.

A USEFUL DETAIL

Keep this bowl separate from thirsty pansies or parsley. Sharing one watering routine would make the combination harder to manage.

Plant notes: S16, S17, S03 | Source details on page 27.

11

The cold-weather branch urn

Cut cedar, pinecones and dried hydrangeas



This final idea uses cut materials rather than living flowering plants. Bare branches give height, evergreen sprays fill the base and dried hydrangeas add pale flower shapes. It is a useful choice when November brings repeated freezes.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- 5 sturdy bare branches, about 36-40 in / 90-100 cm long
- 8 cedar sprays and 6 pine sprays, roughly 12-18 in / 30-45 cm long
- 3 dried hydrangea heads, 6 pinecones and a few dry copper leaves
- Short stakes, soft ties, florist wire and 1 outdoor-rated faux pumpkin

Container: Broad-based stone-look urn, about 24 in / 61 cm wide, with drainage and a deep removable insert if needed.

POSITION

Any sheltered porch position. Cut materials need no growing light.

WEATHER

Suitable as a decorative display in freezing weather. Shelter dried flowers from rain.

ASSEMBLY

45-60 minutes

Make this planter

11 / The cold-weather branch urn

Firm used potting mix or damp sand for anchoring, not live roots. No living root balls are planted in this design.

1 Stabilize the urn

Set the empty urn on level paving in its final place. Use a broad base and a deep insert if the urn has a hollow pedestal. Fill the planting section with firm used mix or damp sand, leaving a small rim margin.

2 Anchor the branches

Before the filling freezes, insert branches 8-10 in / 20-25 cm deep. Group their bases around two short stakes and tie them firmly. Leave about 24-28 in / 60-70 cm visible above the rim. Shorten stems if the pot rocks.

3 Make the green base

Remove foliage from the lowest few inches of each evergreen cutting. Push stem ends into the filling around the branches, working around the rim. Alternate cedar and pine textures, keeping the center open enough to reach the supports.

4 Add pale flower heads

Set three hydrangea heads at different heights in the lower half of the arrangement. Support thin stems with stakes. Keep them beneath the porch roof and away from a dripping gutter or roof edge.

5 Attach the smaller pieces

Wire each cone to a short stake, tuck sharp wire ends inward and insert it among the greenery. Add a few dry copper leaves. Place the faux pumpkin beside the urn so it cannot roll into the path.

6 Test and finish

Tug each branch lightly to check its support. Step back, shorten uneven stems and keep the doorway clear. On a mild day, dampen dry anchoring mix if needed, but never pour water onto a frozen pot or icy paving.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Check supports after wind. Replace brittle or browned cuttings and remove damp, spoiled dried flowers. Keep the arrangement away from candles, heaters and exhausts. It is a decorative display, so no fertilizer or plant-growth routine is needed.

AFTER THANKSGIVING

Remove the pumpkin and copper leaves for a quieter winter look. Replace cut foliage when tired. Strip wire and ties from all plant material before composting, then store reusable stakes and decorations dry.

A USEFUL DETAIL

If the porch is open to heavy rain, leave out the dried hydrangeas and use extra pinecones. Choose a shorter branch outline on windy sites.

Plant notes: S04 | Source details on page 27.

Keep the welcome going

A short routine for living plants, cut stems and the doorway around them.

Check the display when you come home or head out. Feel the mix before watering, look beneath a few leaves and notice what the weather has changed. Watering needs differ: the succulent bowl should not share the same routine as a mum or leafy herb container.

A QUICK CARE RHYTHM

Before watering. Check moisture around more than one root ball. Water unfrozen mix when it needs it and allow drainage. Empty collected water from outer pots.

After rough weather. Check branch ties, damaged leaves and any water trapped beneath pots. Shelter vulnerable plants before the next severe spell.

Before guests arrive. Remove spent flowers, inspect pumpkins for soft spots and sweep the approach. Make sure a person carrying a dish can pass without brushing plants.

IF THE DISPLAY STARTS TO STRUGGLE

Drooping in wet mix

Pause watering. Check outlets and root-ball depth. Shelter from heavy rain and replace a plant if its crown has rotted.

Drooping in dry mix

Water slowly until the root balls are damp and excess drains. Check again later. Water can run around a dry root ball.

Few flowers in cold weather

Keep foliage tidy and protect plants as needed. Survival does not guarantee bloom. Buy flowering stock for a near-term event.

Branches wobble or pot rocks

Shorten the branches, secure their bases or remove them. Move a top-heavy arrangement to a broader container.

Dried flowers spoil in rain

Remove spoiled heads and use cones or fresh evergreen cuttings instead. Keep dry materials under the porch roof.

A PLAN FOR THE PLANTS YOU KEEP

Remove holiday decorations first. Give crowded herbs, foliage perennials and the dwarf spruce their own room when the local transplanting season allows. Compost plain, healthy plant material and remove all wire, ties and plastic. Dry and store the reusable pieces, ready for another year.

Plant notes: S02, S03, S04 | Source details on page 27.

Sources and further reading

Plant care checked against extension, botanical and specialist nursery guidance.

The recipes and layouts are original Gardening Latest combinations. These references support the plant and container-care notes. Click a source title to open it. Local forecasts, nursery labels and regional guidance should guide final plant choices.

S01**Ornamental cabbage and kale**

University of Wisconsin Extension

S02**Pansy planting and winter growth**

University of Georgia Extension

S03**Drainage in containers**

UC Master Gardeners

S04**Protecting plants in freezing weather**

Oregon State University Extension

S05**Growing parsley**

University of Minnesota Extension

S06**Cool-season container plants**

Illinois Extension, Gardeners Corner

S07**Leaf mustard (*Brassica juncea*)**

NC State Extension Plant Toolbox

S08**Sweet alyssum**

NC State Extension Plant Toolbox

S09**Heuchera / coral bells**

NC State Extension Plant Toolbox

S10**Carex oshimensis Evergold**

Hoffman Nursery

S11**Florist cyclamen**

NC State Extension Plant Toolbox

S12**Soft shield fern**

NC State Extension Plant Toolbox

S13**Garden chrysanthemums**

NC State Extension Plant Toolbox

S14**Dusty miller**

NC State Extension Plant Toolbox

S15**White spruce and dwarf Conica**

The Morton Arboretum

S16**Growing Sempervivum**

Royal Horticultural Society

S17**Sedum album**

NC State Extension Plant Toolbox

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Designed for homeowners using nursery plants in short seasonal displays. Measurements and mix allowances are approximate.

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