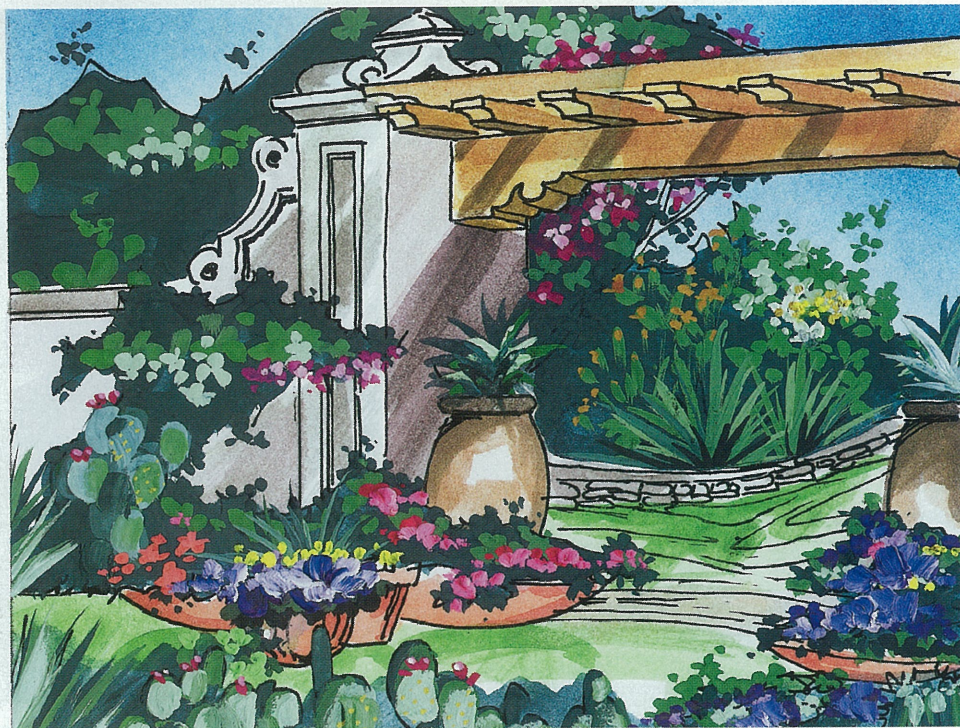




potted plants

I would like to supplement the vegetation around my patios and walkways with container plants. Can you offer some tips for successful container gardening?



Text by Troy Bankord • Illustration by Clint Miller



Incorporating pots and vessels adds pizzazz to any garden or patio. Pots are available in every imaginable shape, size and color. For a unique statement, consider planting in such items as hollowed-out tree stumps, painted tires, or galvanized feed troughs and water tubs.

Try grouping pots of different sizes and filling them with a variety of perennials and annuals; or, use a pair of matching vessels to flank a front door, frame a view, or mark the entrance to a garden space. Pots with clean, simple lines filled with the same plant can be placed in a row for a dramatic effect. Groupings of small pots around fountains or lining the tops of walls create Old World charm.

Following are more ideas and suggestions for successful container gardening.

- When grouping plants in a single container, make sure all have the same watering requirement. This prevents over- or under-watering. Emitters or bubblers can be run through the bottoms or sides of pots for ease of maintenance but should operate on a separate valve than bedding plants.

- Quality potting soils sold at many garden centers generally have a high nutrient content, but most are very porous and dry out too quickly in this area's heat. Also, water simply runs straight downward and out the bottom of the pot. Add pumice to potting mixes

to help retain moisture, or add one-third native soil or coarse sand to two-thirds potting medium. In shady locations, it's OK to use soil straight from the bag.

- Top-dress pots with stones or gravel to help minimize evaporation.

- Be careful where you purchase plants. Flowers from shady garden centers are not "hardened off," or acclimated, to our intense sun. Before being planted, they must be transitioned to full sun. Place in moist soil and compact it around the roots to release air pockets that may cause root balls to dry out and die. Take care not to bury plants any deeper than they were in nursery containers. Doing so causes them to rot at the base.

- The following are hardy permanent plantings to utilize along with annual color: agaves, aloes, bougainvillea, boxwood, cacti, daylilies, dwarf olives, ficus, irises, 'Katie' ruellia, ornamental grasses, pencil cactus, Robellini palms, rosemary, roses, sea lavender, slipper plants and yuccas.

The look of a garden can be changed almost instantly by adding potted plants. But remember, because containers require such frequent watering, they also will need more frequent fertilization. ☀

Principal of T.M. Bankord Inc., Troy Bankord is an award-winning Valley landscape contractor and environmental designer.