

Drama in a POT

Maximize the impact of your container plantings with these big ideas.

If your garden, patio, or entryway seems lacking in pizzazz, potted plants may be the answer. But not just any pot, and not just any plants. Punch up the excitement with inspiration from Santa Barbara garden designer Margaret Grace.

Her beautiful and practical designs enhance normally unplantable spots such as patios, steps, and areas of poor soil. They can draw attention away from eyesores or screen them from view. The containers also bring design sophistication, on a grand scale, to your yard. Solo pots make great focal points, while groupings (with repeating or compatible plants) bring interest to large, nondescript areas.

To get started, go pot-shopping—and think big. Make your container has a drainage hole. Next, fill the

pot with high-grade potting soil. Save yourself time and effort down the road by sprinkling the soil with an all-purpose, timed-release fertilizer after planting. Choose plants with similar requirements in terms of irrigation, drainage, and sun exposure. Grace's picks suit her Mediterranean-like climate, but gardeners in colder areas can mimic these designs, either by treating the plants as annuals or bringing them indoors for the winter.

Design with an eye to drama. "Try sending one element high, one element low, and [keeping] the rest of the focus on good solid ground," Grace says. Let an accent or focal plant claim one-third of the display and supporting players take the other two-thirds. Repeat design motifs and colors from your larger landscape. That's all it takes, Grace says, to start living large.

BY TERI DUNN PHOTOGRAPHER: ED GOHLICH FIELD EDITOR: ANDREA CAUGHEY
GARDEN DESIGNER: MARGARET GRACE

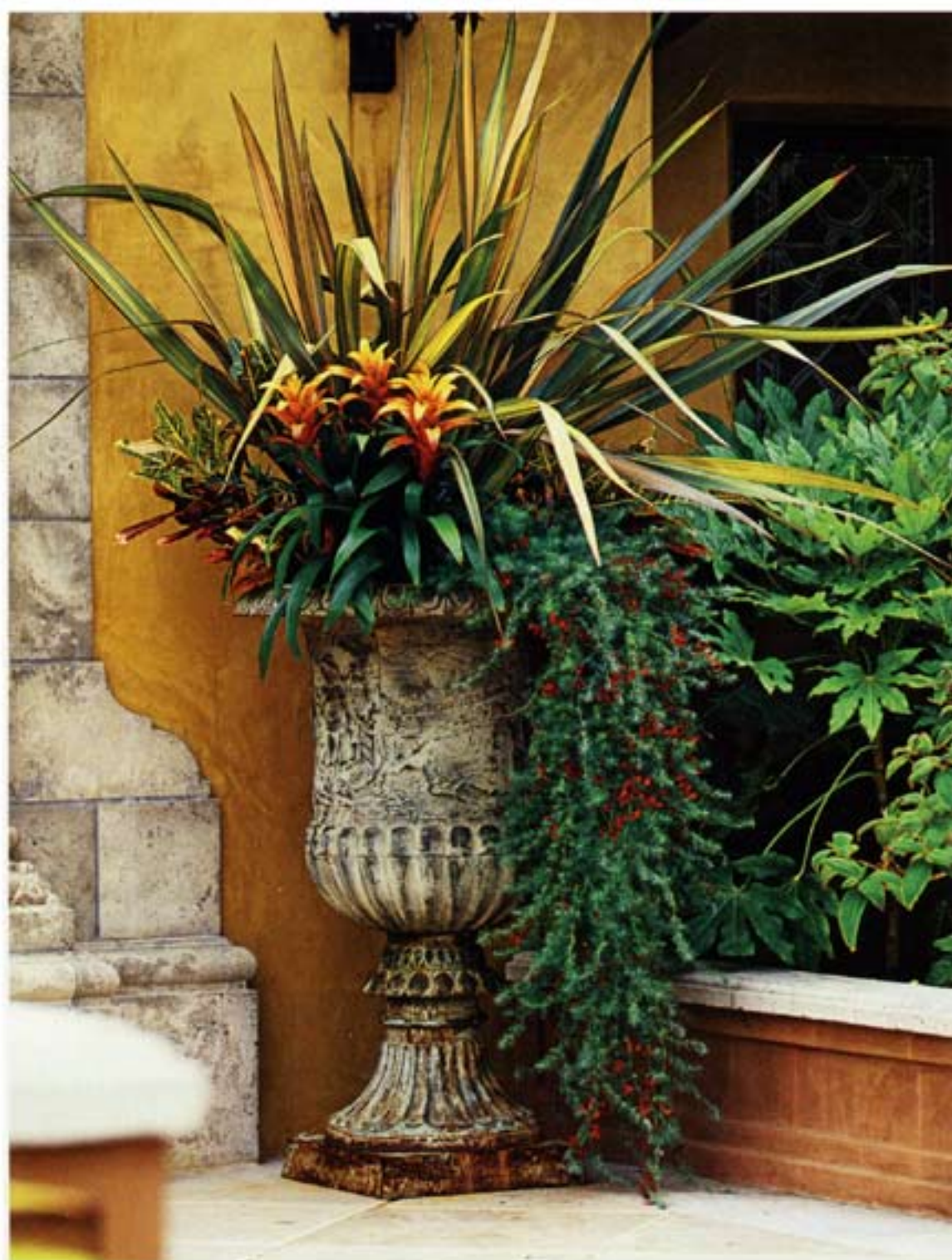
■ | A TREAT TO SEE
(AND EAT)

Many herbs are valued for their foliage rather than attention-grabbing flowers. This makes an herb garden an ideal backdrop for a spectacular container brimming with long-blooming annuals such as yellow and purple million bells (*Calibrachoa*). The miniature *Citrus* 'Pixie Tangerine' is the star, though, providing a visual and tasty treat.



▶ | IN PLAIN SIGHT

If a pot is adorned with interesting decorative elements, make sure to display its charms for all to admire. This unusual square pot was given a corner spot on a patio where it can be viewed from two angles. Compact growers—tricolor sage (*Salvia officinalis* 'Tricolor'), purple million bells (*Calibrachoa*), and an upright semidwarf kumquat plant (*Citrus kumquat* 'Nagami')—dress the container without trailing over the rim.



▶ | COMPATIBLE NATURE

A tall, narrow pot with tall, narrow plants adds fabulous impact to this skinny entryway. Compatibility with your home's architecture is key when you place a pot this close to the wall and door. A vintage Italianate urn complements this Italian-style home. Furthering the theme are warm-color, Mediterranean-style plants, including variegated croton (*Codiaeum variegatum* var. *pictum*), parrot's beak (*Lotus maculatus* 'Amazon Sunset'), yellow-tinged bromeliad, and *Phormium* 'Maori Queen'.

▶ | THE BASIS OF COLOR

A pot's color can make a spectacular impact. This glowing oxblood-red container is the star of the garden, yet it directs eyes beyond and above to the richly hued ruby blooms of kangaroo paws (*Anigozanthos* 'Red Cross'). The plants in this pot, especially *Phormium* 'Pink Stripe', flatter it, but because they are of a slightly softer hue, allow it to remain in the spotlight.



THINKING OUTSIDE THE POT

The vertical form of an antique Tudor chimney stands out in the sweeping cliffside setting even as it echoes the shape of chartreuse-hue Pride of Madeira flower spikes (*Echium candicans*). By including a purple-flowering butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) in the pot when a larger version is growing in the ground behind it, both color and form are repeated—to powerful effect. Repetition of plants helps integrate the container into the landscape.



▶ | CONTRASTING VIEW

Big pots make for striking displays. In this appealing scene, roses festoon a pergola—and repeat in the large pots. A sharp color contrast from the pergola's vibrant red blooms was necessary; white 'Iceberg', a long-blooming, practically thorn-free rose, filled the bill. Trailing ivy (*Hedera helix* 'Glacier'), catmint, and white bacopa (*Sutera cordata*) hide the "bare knees" of the 'Iceberg' rose and soften the pot's edges.

▶ | A SOFTER TOUCH

A showy pot is a great way to soften the transition from the horizontal expanse of a yard to vertical walls and fences. Pick a tall or climbing plant to be the star. This pot hosts two climbers, a robust honeysuckle with creamy white, fragrant flowers (*Lonicera hildebrandiana*) and a purple-flowering pea relative, *Hardenbergia violacea*. Santa Barbara daisy (*Erigeron karvinskianus*) and *Sutera cordata* serve as ornamental trailers.





▶ | A PLACE TO GO

Make a pot a garden destination. The plants within should be dramatic in form and contrast in color with their surroundings. Billowing ornamental grasses are ideal, in this case Texas needlegrass (*Nassella tenuissima*). Long tresses of white bacopa (*Sutera bacopa*) planted at the back of the urn help it pop from the path beyond. At the same time, urn plants repeat the color of the Pacific Giants delphiniums.

▶ | HARMONIC CONVERGENCE

The best container displays create harmony, with the pot's color or style matching nearby garden elements. Here, a verdigris antique urn matches the scale, texture, and color of two wrought-iron benches. Simplicity in plant color is also restful and soothing to the eye. In this setting, scarlet roses (Scarlet Meidiland Rosa) and trailing white bacopa (*Sutera cordata*) provide easy elegance.



▶ | ON BACKGROUND

A dark backdrop, as provided by this hedge of yew pine (*Podocarpus macrophyllus*), presents an interesting challenge. Both pot and contents need to offer contrasting colors, or they won't get noticed. Here, plants with standout foliage accomplish the job: chartreuse-hue foxtail fern (*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Myers') and wine-leaf 'Palace Purple' coralbells (*Heuchera micrantha*). □



More container gardens:
www.bhg.com/sipcontainers