

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

IN THE GARDEN

'Hot-pot' route to colour all season

IT'S your last chance to plant up your summer containers to give them long enough to root down and provide the colour you need to last the season. And if you're not going away this year, you might like to introduce an exotic corner to your patio. Broad-leaved cannas, hostas, deep orange dahlias, fiery crocosmias and tender bulbs such as gloriosa

will all add heat to the scene, while plants of architectural interest such as Fatsia japonica, palms, cordyline and phormium can all add to that tropical feel. Put sun-loving palms and succulents in the hottest spots and position shade-tolerant plants, such as hostas, beneath the canopies of large-leaved plants. It will be too late now to grow your tropical specimens from scratch, but you'll be able to find them in garden centres and nurseries. Remember, though, that some of these plants, such as cannas and bananas, are tender and will need extra care to overwinter them. Tropical styles tend to look best in urban situations and work well with modern furniture and accessories. Remember that with exotic schemes, the emphasis is on the bold plants, not the pots. So don't use elaborate, brightly-coloured pots for an exotic effect and avoid anything green in the background, such as a lawn, so that all the leaves are clearly visible. Good backdrops include trachycarpus wagnerianus, a neater version of the Chusan palm, with smaller, stiffer leaves, able to withstand a windy sight; or chamaerops humilis, a slow-growing dwarf fan palm which comes from southern Europe but is happy in colder areas.

Tropical scenes need careful, sparing use of really vibrant colour. Red hot pokers (Kniphofia), ginger lilies (Hedychium) and cannas can provide this. Good varieties include C. striata, which has 45cm (18in) paddle-shaped, green and yellow striped leaves and produces sizzling orange flowers in midsummer. The rich orange flowers and variegated leaves of C. pretoria create an exotic feel and another good choice is C. president, which produces scarlet blooms, or the golden yellow King Midas. Cannas need loads of humus in the soil and do well in large pots in a sheltered, sunny spot. Alternatively, go for small pots of sizzling scarlet geraniums placed in front of the larger foliage plants. Vibrant ornamental grasses can also be used in tropical schemes such as Imperata cylindrica Rubra, which makes a clump of bright green leaves whose tips turn blood red and then the rest of the leaves follow suit, reddening almost to the base. Fluffy silvery-white flowers appear late in the summer. This one needs fertile, moist soil rich in humus and should be placed in full sun or part shade. You'll need to mulch it in winter if it is to survive. Try to keep each pot reasonably simple, giving stand-alone space to foliage specimens such as hostas



EXOTIC CORNER: The rich foliage of exotic plants will create a tropical feel on a patio.

What to do this week

- On wall-trained shrubs, remove shoots growing directly away from, or straight into, the wall. Healthy new tips of many shrubs can be used as cuttings.
- Thin apples by picking off damaged or diseased fruits.
- Sow a few seeds of crops like lettuce, radish and mixed leaves every two weeks from now on.
- Lift and divide congested clumps of flag iris after flowering.
- Take canna lilies out of the greenhouse and plant outside, providing taller accent plants in summer bedding displays.
- Plant marrows, courgettes and squashes outside now.
- Tie cordon tomatoes to thick stakes at least 3ft (90cm) tall.
- Top up pond water levels as they fall in hot weather.
- Recycle grass cuttings, composting them in a bin or using them as a mulch around trees and bushes.
- Cut back overgrown Clematis alpina and C macropetala hard once flowering is over.
- Raise biennials and perennials by sowing in pots or in a nursery bed, to plant out in the autumn.
- In the greenhouse, take cuttings from coleus, fancy-leaf begonias, African violets and other house plants.
- Collect slugs and snails by doing a garden patrol in the evening, or after rain.
- Pinch out the side shoots of sweet peas being grown as cordons.
- Pick off the dead flower heads of rhododendrons and azaleas.



CENTREPIECE: The cordyline is a great plant to use at the centre of a container to help create a "hot-pot" garden.

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