



PATIO POTS A PLenty

BY LESLIE PETERSON

Decorate your outdoor space by putting down roots in garden planters that suit their surroundings – and their contents.

□ Puttering around with pots seems to get better each season given the delightful diversity of garden ware. To enhance outdoor spaces – whether balconies, porches, rooftops or patios – there's a whole new world of pots and planters, from old fashioned to high-tech, self-watering, LED (light emitting diodes) and solar planters, made out of clay, concrete, zinc, resin, aluminum, steel, seagrass, polyethylene, fibreglass, plastic and wood. Cost? Anything from single figures to hundreds of dollars – and up. Weight? If you're interested in lead you could be thinking a hefty 400 kilograms for some models.

"We are fortunate to have so much variety in planters – there are so many shapes and sizes to contemplate," says Vancouver landscape architect Elisabeth Whitelaw. Choose as large a one as fits the scale, she advises. "Smaller pots dry out faster and can look like too much jumble, whereas larger ones can make an architectural statement that suits the material you have. For example, on a concrete patio go with concrete and simple lines."

Be wary of some pots imported from Asia, she cautions. "Some of them aren't frost-proof; they're too porous so they will shrink and swell as they freeze and thaw, so they will slough off any glaze." Her views were echoed three centuries earlier when John Morton noted that "garden pots made of [the local clay] tho' never so wellbaked are very apt to scale, and be broken in pieces by foul weather and frosts." One remedy then suggested – soak them in horse urine. How well that worked was not noted.

Where to find pots? Any local garden centre should have them, as well as specialty shops such as Bloomfields Garden Décor. Gardenstone, in Richmond, manufactures a variety of concrete shapes, sizes and colours and sells all over North America. Based in Ontario, Rittenhouse's cast-concrete garden planters and sculptures represent Haida mythology, from dramatic bear and sunbird masks to powerful raven, eagle, orca, wolf and beaver images. They also produce ingenious LED and solar-powered resin planters, Glow & Grow Pots.



Rittenhouse's garden planters and sculptures, above, represent Haida mythology.

Having chosen your pot or planter, checking to ensure it has proper drainage, what do you put in it? If it's metal, consider lining it with a waffle drain fabric such as Nilex, which also serves as insulation. Then add growing medium: one-third each of compost, sand, pumice or perlite, which supports the plants but has the advantage of being lightweight, a major consideration for balconies and rooftops.

What to plant? First, Whitelaw counsels, "It's really important where the pot is located, to choose appropriate plants for shade or dry shade or sunny spaces. Then I collect the materials and cluster them to see what works together, standing back to look at the size of the pot with the size of the display. It's important to get the proportions right. You can always start with a small shrub such as perennial euphorbia and leave it in the centre all year round. I choose a number of leaf textures and colours that work together, especially some trailing leaves such as Baltic ivy, dark green and evergreen, with a small leaf. Bacopia is a fine addition – it often winters over."

Search out plants that will last all year round, include bulbs, then add annuals to the mix, she says. "It's nice to have it very full. In winter, I love to put in bright red twigs with whites, something like huckleberry or dogwood. They add colour and height plus there's no upkeep. Just take them out in the summer." □



The art of clustering pots, above and opposite page, displayed by Whichford Pottery, in England.