



Poolside Container Plantings

by Rosie Bonar, UC Master Gardener

One area that is particularly challenging to landscape attractively is the area around a swimming pool. From a plant's point of view, that location is less than ideal for growth. Pools add reflected light, and the concrete decking reflects heat and is potentially a lot hotter than soil. While the pool and the tile look inviting, the hot, stark deck needs plants to give the area a more relaxing, pleasing appearance.



What can you do? One solution is using containers full of plants. Containers can be placed anywhere and add a lot of interest for the eye.

Let's start with choosing containers. Selecting containers of differing sizes but with some unifying factor is a design principal worth following. Choosing the same style, color or shape of pots or plants can unify your design. For example, if you want to plant a variety of plants, simplify your design by using one or two styles of pots. Conversely, if you want a variety of pots, plant one or two species of plants. Try to choose pots to match or blend with the architecture or style of your house and pool.



When it comes to plants, you have lots of choices.

- If containers will be sitting out in the sun on a hot deck most of the time, planting drought tolerant and heat loving plants is a good idea. Be aware that not all drought tolerant plants love heat or a lot of light, so choose wisely. These plants have worked for me: geraniums, boxwood, dwarf citrus, herbs such as rosemary and basil and annuals such as Alyssum.
- Plants in pots tend to dry out quickly and need frequent watering and feeding, so choose plants that have adapted to dry soil and lots of heat.
- There are many ornamental grasses (such as deergrass) and succulents (such as hens and chicks) that look great in containers. I had good success growing runner bamboo in containers, which is very invasive when planted in the ground. To avoid constant problems with sweeping, raking and cleaning, select low-litter plants.
- Vary the height, texture and color of plants in pots that are grouped together. It makes it more interesting for the eye.

- For variety have some plants cascade down over the sides of the containers. If you plant more than one kind of plant in the same container, make sure that the water needs of the plants are the same.



Before planting into pots make sure that the container has good drainage. Water must be able to drain out of the bottom; otherwise it will accumulate in the pot and drown the roots. Use potting soil, not soil from the yard.

In order to give the roots room to grow, choose a pot slightly larger than the original container, and replot the plant when the roots start growing out of the bottom.

Elevate the pots a few inches above the deck. The deck gets too hot for plants to sit directly on it, and if air can circulate under pots, it helps cool off the roots. Using plant trays or saucers with rollers makes clean up easier and you can rearrange plants for a fresh look or if the pool party is so large, the plants can be moved out of the way.

Like all container plants, your new pool plants have special needs. The moisture level must be monitored closely, especially during the summer. They also require fertilizing regularly during their growing season.

Choosing the right plant/container combinations and following these maintenance tips will help make the pool area look cooler and more inviting, and set the mood for fun summer parties and lounging pool side.

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