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SOW AND DIPITY

ONE PLANTER **FOUR SEASONS**

**A SEASON-BY-SEASON GUIDE TO CREATING A GORGEOUS
PLANTER FOR YEAR ROUND INTEREST**



By Shelley Levis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1
Introduction

2
Planter Basics

3
Spring

4
Summer

5
Fall

6
Winter

7
Budget Planning



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

ONE PLANTER, FOUR SEASONS

This season-by-season guide will help you create gorgeous planters without a lot of fuss or maintenance.

Using just one main planter as your focal point, you will learn how to create vignettes your neighbors will envy and your friends will admire.

Included in this book are tips on:

- * Planning ahead for target bloom times
- * Choosing plants for several seasons of color
- * Using cheap and cheerful plants in between seasons
- * Decorative elements that make your planters pop
- * How to create stunning outdoor vignette's
- * Create a budget for your year round planter



Photo of my planter in late spring. Use decorative elements like a cute sign, a bird house or painted twigs to make your planter fun and interesting.



All gardening is landscape painting.

~ William Kent



CHAPTER TWO

PLANTER BASICS



Choosing your Planters

This really depends on where you plan to place them. You may want to have two on either side of a stairway in which case tall or urn shaped styles would be more suitable if there is a railing involved.

If they are meant to be at the bottom of the steps, short round or square concrete planters may be the right choice. These anchor your entry way.

Like a formal look? A large black ceramic square style or pillar shaped container has a clean polished look. For something more rustic choose a half barrel or recycle an old canteen. If casual is more your style a simple urn shape in a neutral color compliments any type of dwelling.

The thing to keep in mind for your featured planter is its size as it will be the main focal point of your seasonal display. Choose one that makes a statement and build off of that.

You should consider all the seasons when choosing your planter and anticipate that winter will expose all sides when you don't have annuals cascading over the edge.

Bigger is Better

KEY FACTORS FOR SELECTING YOUR PLANTER

- * **Drainage:** A planter that is exposed to rainfall must have holes in the bottom to allow for drainage where as one placed under a roof can get away with having drain rock in a sealed bottom. Watch that you don't over water these.
- * **Filler:** Recycle big chunks of Styrofoam to fill space at the bottom of big planters. But DO NOT use this material if you plan to grow food in them. They can leach chemicals.
- * **Ceramic VS Plastic:** Ceramic is beautiful but it can crack in the winter and become very heavy once filled with soil. Plastic and poly-resin planters have come a long way in their appearance over the years but can be expensive. Buy the best you can afford for the long term.
- * **Soil:** Use a lightweight soil designed for planters. It will have better water retention and drainage. Top soil is not ideal in containers as it is heavy, mostly full of sand or just in poor condition to supply the required nutrients for your plants.

ONE PLANTER FOUR SEASONS



Each season has its own unique theme, holiday and color scheme. We will use these seasonal attributes to create four very distinct looks that seamlessly blend into one another. Let us begin.

CHAPTER THREE

SPRING



SPRING



THE YEARS FIRST BLOOMS

Spring garden planning actually starts in the previous fall season with the planting of your bulbs. However, we will start our season-by-season guide with the years first color.

If you just so happen to be reading this in fall then perfect, head to that chapter and start there first.

It will take you a full year to get your planter on track, so don't worry too much where you start. It took me two spring seasons to produce the material for this guide so you can use it to help you plan ahead no matter what season your in.

Plants for Early Spring

My suggestions for this book will be easy to grow, inexpensive plants that are proven winners with the best performance for each season.

Since we are attempting to create a unique look for different times of the year, all the plants we will use will be annuals with the exception of the vine trained to climb the trellis at the back of the planter.



The most obvious first bloomers are your bulbs. Let's assume you have already planted them back in the fall and they are just beginning to push through, more on these later.

Great plant picks for early spring are primrose and pansies, they will give your planter an instant pop of bright color at a very low cost. These are what we refer to in the industry as cheap and cheerful!

Preparing the Planter

In the middle of February, remove the greens you used in the winter display as explained in Chapter 6. You should find that your bulbs are well on their way.

You may need to add some more soil at this stage to top it up but be gentle as you work around the bulbs.



Plant your primrose and pansies around the edges and add a few to fill the center. This display will last well into late April and will only get better over the next couple of months as your tulips and daffodils will soon fill in the gaps.

I like to top off my planters with a little bit of moss that I have growing in my yard, I see no need to buy bags of it when I can harvest my own. Put your moss killer away and use it!

The Finishing Touches

Now you can add your decorative elements. I have bundles of curly willow that I spray paint in different colors for each season to stuff into planters. Not only do they add interest and height, the extra color is a simple way to jazz up your containers.

Wicker balls bought from a craft store can be spray painted and mounted on skewers for a fun accent. Use other items like a birdhouse stake, garden art or a cute sign. The Spring sign here was made from a recycled board. For full instructions to create your own visit this link:

<http://www.sowanddipity.com/first-sign-of-spring>



Have fun using different items in your display. I once used a pink tomato cage as a tiered plant rack and dropped pots in it that fit snug around the rings. A grouping of terra cotta pots stuffed with just moss adds interest to your vignette.

In the cooler early months of spring before the rest of nature is waking up, you can create a beautiful colorful planter using whatever elements you can find, paint or easily make while still keeping your costs down.



Dress it up for the Holiday

Don't forget Easter! A dollar store bag of plastic eggs can easily become picks by popping a skewer through the end and placing them into your planter.

Another easy weekend craft is this adorable burlap bunny. It's quickly stitched together and you can recycle plastic shopping bags as stuffing. For the project details visit this link:

<http://www.sowanddipity.com/burlap-bunny/>



CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMER



SUMMER



Does your garden have a sense of humor? Have some fun with quirky colorful props like these two purple flamingo's here.



Gardening is the art that uses flowers and plants as paint, and the soil and sky as the canvas.

~ Elizabeth Murray



Plants for Summer Blooms

The key to good garden design is to choose a few plants and repeat, repeat, repeat. My experience as a garden designer and now as a garden center manager, has taught me that unless you are gifted with two green thumbs, leave the fussy plants to the pro's.

Success is guaranteed when you don't try to over do it. Big blocks of color will be more eye catching than a potpourri of dozens of different flowers. Not to mention much easier to maintain.



As summer drags on, we lose our enthusiasm for watering and deadheading. My plant suggestions will require the minimum amount of effort to just watering but will continue to look great up the first hard frost.

Preparing the Planter

By the beginning of May, your tulips and primrose will have finished their show. But don't be too eager to plant those annuals quite yet. One cold night and all those plants will perish leaving you frustrated and a little lighter in the pocket.

Let the leaves from your bulbs die back so that the energy goes back into the bulb for next year. Once they have yellowed they are ready to be cut off.



Now this process isn't a pretty one so a quick fix while you wait to plant your annuals is to cheat and pop in a forced hydrangea that you can get at any of the big box stores in early May. Just leave it in its pot and position it on an angle like I did here.

This will camouflage the bulbs leaves while they die back and look great with your pansies that are still happy and blooming.

Time To Plant

It's safe to plant your annuals after the last frost warning has passed. In most of Canada and the Northern part of the U.S., this is generally after the long weekend or the full moon in May.

If you live in a warmer climate you can plant much earlier and for those who live further North you will have to wait a little later.

Canada uses the Plant Hardiness Zone Map and the U.S. refers to the USDA Hardiness Zone Map. The zones are rated on a number system with colder climates between 1-5, warmer 5-10.

Just make sure that you have the green light before you plant your annuals regardless where you live so that your plants have the best chance to survive. There's no use trying to rush this, Mother Nature wins every time.

Try searching for the Farmers Almanac for frost dates or use this great interactive map on <http://www.plantmaps.com>

Now let's get that planter done. That hydrangea you bought doesn't have to go to waist as you can plant it out in your garden. It won't look very good next year because it needs to experience all four seasons to get acclimated but it will reward you the second year with beautiful blooms.

Cut back your yellowed bulb leaves and dig out your primula and pansies. Primula can be planted into the garden as well and could come back depending on your winters.

You can save your pansies for fall and temporarily find a place to plant them for summer. It would be good to give them a haircut though to keep them compact as they can get very leggy in the heat. They perform best in cooler conditions.

Proven Winners for Summer Flowers

- ★ **Geraniums:** Yes, geraniums. Don't discount this common annual because it's, well common. This performer will bloom all summer right up to the first hard frost. It's one of the longest blooming, carefree annuals you can plant and because they are so inexpensive, it's the best bang for your buck.
- ★ **Petunia's:** No other trailing annual lasts as long and is as prolific a bloomer as petunia's. Growers keep pushing the envelope and developing stunning varieties each year.
- ★ **Ipomea:** Otherwise known as Potato vine, this trailer is another one that seems to have a new variety every year. The bright chartreuse green leaves looks amazing against any petunia color you choose and the bonus with this plant is it just gets more fabulous as fall winds down to an end.
- ★ **Dracena:** This is a cheap little spike of a plant that puts on a lot of size over summer. It's that element that will give height to your planter.
- ★ **Purple Fountain Grass:** Considered an annual in northern climes, this grass is simply stunning throughout summer and finishes with big showy plumes in fall. Grasses create movement in the slightest breeze making your planters come alive.

Pulling It All Together



The Formula for Perfect Pots

- ✦ **Thriller:** A tall vertical element that adds height and drama to your planter.
- ✦ **Filler:** A mounding plant that gives fullness and dimension at the level of the container.
- ✦ **Spiller:** This is anything that will cascade over the edge so that color spills outside of the containers boundaries.

Thriller

A thriller is usually a leafy spike, tall grass or other colorful upright plant like a Canna lily. Think of this element as your drama maker in your combo.

Perennials can work too, like Rudbeckia, garden Phlox, or Delphiniums. But your bling element doesn't necessarily have to be a plant at all.

As you can see in my planter, I left my curly willow branches and birdhouse in for height. At the back of the planter there is a lattice that is permanently placed for a perennial climbing vine. I used a Hydrangea Petiolaris that will be filled with white blooms once established.

Filler

The bulk of your planter will be made up with fillers. These are your mounding, medium sized plants such as geraniums, heliotrope, gerbera's etc.

Most of these will burn out as the summer wears on and will need to be pulled once they have finished their show. Geraniums however keep on blooming so including one in your arrangement is a good idea. By the time your ditching your spent plants, your geranium will have put on size and will easily fill the gap.

I do have a cheat solution for when your planter starts to look haggard mid summer which I will explain shortly.

Spiller

The effect of cascading plants is what really makes your planter appear full and established. They add weight and carry color over the side to finish off your look.

Petunias are the obvious choice with all their blooms and color variations. But Lobelia, trailing Verbena, Bacopa, and trailing Ivy Geraniums are all easy, low maintenance choices.

A real winner is Ipomea or potato vine. As previously mentioned, it's grown for its leaves and ability to put on a lot of size in just a few short growing months.

Additionally, while your pulling out your spent summer annuals, this plant will linger on until the first hard frost allowing you to use its beauty for a nice fall display.

Mid-Summer Cheat Tip

Get in the habit of planning your annual planters, baskets and displays, in three month increments. At the garden center, people buy their hanging baskets in the middle of April and then are disappointed that they are finished blooming by the middle of July, right when they are entertaining and enjoying their gardens.

It's not realistic to expect a plant to bloom profusely for more than 3 months, they simply get worn out. One way I plan for this is to buy ready made baskets in spring and make a few of my own from basket stuffers in mid to late May. By the time my spring baskets are done, my fresh baskets are looking great and I swap them out.

Another cheat tip for an instantly beautiful planter is to pop in an already established hanging basket that you can buy inexpensively from a garden center.



Simply dig out a hole in the soil of your planter to fit the size of your hanging basket, gently squeeze the root ball out of the plastic pot and plunk it in.



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CHAPTER FIVE

FALL



FALL



Fall is one of my favorite times of the year. Of all the seasons, this is the most expressive in that the leaves of trees join the color scheme as well.



Winter is an etching, spring a watercolor, summer an oil painting and autumn a mosaic of them all.

~ **Stanley Horowitz**



Plants for Fall Color

As summer comes to an end, the pinks, purples and blues of the season begin to fade and are replaced with the oranges, reds and ambers of fall.

It's a wonderful time of the year where we can use the seasons harvests as props in our vignettes.

- * **Fall Mums-** Choose one that has 80% of its buds closed. This will ensure 6-8 weeks of blooms. Learn more on how to select and care for them here:
<http://www.sowanddipity.com/care-for-fall-mums/>
- * **Millet-** This ornamental foliage plant has deep purple, almost black leaves and produces a wonderful flower spiked plume. Striking in planters when paired with orange colors.
- * **Pansies-** These plants perform wonderful in spring and fall when temperatures are cooler.
- * **Ornamental Corn-** Another fall foliage plant with pale green, white and pink stripes on its leaves.
- * **Ornamental Peppers-** Adds interest and pops of color for an interesting look. Available in purple, orange, red and yellow.
- * **Heuchera-** A perennial foliage plant that comes in a variety of colors, it's hard to choose a favorite.
- * **Winter Heather-** This mounding evergreen shrub has some very gorgeous colors available during this time of year.

Décor for a Fall Vignette



Hay bales, colorful gourds and autumn leaves are perfect for staging your vignette. Use the hay bale as a way to bring height to your display and spill gourds out of a pail or some terra cotta pots.

Visit a local farm or nursery and search for heirloom squashes, gourds and pumpkins. They come in more colors than just orange and their unique shapes add a ton of interest to your design.

Have fun building a scarecrow and put him to the back of your grouping of plants and props to add height.

Collect chestnuts and spill them around the planters. Cut seed heads from perennials that have dried in the hot summer sun and pop them into an old bucket to sit amongst your display.



Tropical plants like Croton or ivy are very inexpensive and act like an annual for summer and fall planters. The first hard frost will take them out so you may choose to save them and bring them indoors before that.

But since they cost just a few dollars I treat them like an annual and toss them into the compost bin when the season is done.

Use the pumpkins and gourds as planters by carving them out and popping in a pansy or two to add to your vignette.



Around mid September, you can pull out the summer annuals. Some petunias will still be blooming but they will most likely look pretty haggard.

The Ipomea will be spilling out of your container and the Draceana spike or Purple Fountain Grass will have put on size. Leave these in and add any of the above suggested plants to fill out your planter.

As you can see in the planter above, the Purple Fountain grass is my thriller. It looks amazing now with its plumes. The green leaves of the Ipomea spill and fill while the props complement the season.



That birdhouse remained in the planter for the last three seasons. The addition of pumpkins, ornamental corn husks, and Chinese lantern seed pods finish off this fall vignette.

This display will now last for the next 2 months through the fall harvest season, Halloween and Thanksgiving.



Planting Bulbs in Containers



Planting bulbs can be done as late as mid November. I caution folks buying bulbs in September not to plant them too early. The ground is still warm and this will actually trigger the bulb to start growing.

Tulips and Daffodils need a minimum of 10-14 weeks of cold temperatures in low light so that they can put on roots. After this period, once the soil begins to warm up and the days get longer, they will start their shoot growth.

The colder nights in November will cause the annuals in your container to decline. Once they've yellowed or wilted, it's time to toss those plants, dig out some of that soil and plant your bulbs.

Bulb Spacing and Planting Depths

- ✳ **Daffodils-** Plant these first at a depth of 8 inches from the top of the soil line. Space them a couple inches apart when you plant them in containers. In the ground, at least 6 inches apart. Cover with 2 inches of soil.
- ✳ **Tulips-** This is your next layer, space these in the approximate spots in between the daffodils below about every 2 inches and cover with at least 6 inches of soil
- ✳ **Crocus and Grape Hyacinths-** These small bulbs only need to be a few inches deep and are easily pushed down into the soil. Simply place your bulbs all around the surface leaving space in between and press them in with your fingers.

The general rule of thumb for planting bulbs is to plant two to three times as deep as the bulbs is long. For instance, Daffodils are about 4" long, so go at least 8" down.

The first to bloom will be your Crocus in late February to mid March. The Daffodils will join them shortly behind in mid to late March and the Tulips and Grape Hyacinths will be next from mid March to late April.

Keep in mind that if your planter is under a roof, it may need to be watered from time to time. Don't let the soil dry out completely, however adding too much water could freeze the bulbs too. Use your judgment depending on the weather conditions.

Bark Mulch Design



A fun way to protect bulbs is with a decorative bark mulch design. You can do this in your planters or garden beds.

This technique uses cedar or red fir mulch as the base cover and blonde sawdust chips as the contrast pattern maker. You simply 'draw' with the sawdust any shape you want, give it a light misting of water to keep it down and after a couple of frosty nights, the design will set and last until the bulbs push through.

Check out this link for more details:

<http://www.sowanddipity.com/decorative-bark-mulch/>

CHAPTER SIX

WINTER



WINTER



Your planter can still be full of life and interest in the winter months by adding some greens and holiday decor



What a severe yet master artist old Winter is... no longer the canvas and the pigments, but the marble and the chisel.

~ **John Burroughs**



Interest for Winter Planters

Evergreen cuttings can be gathered from your own yard trimmings or purchased in bundles from a garden center.

Try to get a good mix of different types of branches to give your planter lots of texture. Simply clean off the cut end of its needles to allow for you to insert them into the soil that is left over in your planter.

Create a fan like affect mixing branches as you go and have a few drape over the sides. Use painted willow branches in gold or silver and even dust a few evergreen magnolia greens with a little paint for extra shimmer.

Go natural by using natures own colorful twigs like red osier dogwood, huckleberry branches or pussy willow stems. Don't forget the berried holly sprigs and for extra color look for the variegated variety.

Some easy accents to add are a few pine cones and some holiday balls. It's fun to add battery operated lighted twigs too.

This is a quick and easy display that will last right up to February as evergreens take a long time to break down.



In addition to dressing your containers with greens, try reusing your wire hanging baskets and do the same thing.

I lined a pretty wire basket with several branches then placed a frozen round luminaire in the center with a battery operated tea light for a magical winter hanging basket.

To see the detailed instructions visit:
<http://www.sowanddipity.com/outdoor-luminaires/>

Touch of Whimsy



This planter had three DIY lighted mini trees for its holiday display. All you need is mini string lights, a tomato cage and some décor mesh to create them.

The full tutorial for these can be found here:

<http://www.sowanddipity.com/tomato-cage-christmas-trees/>

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Budget Planning



Budget Planning

To achieve a year round display celebrating the seasons and holidays, you will need to decide how much your willing to invest in plants and accessories.

In this season-by-season planner, I have outlined several ways to re-use, recycle and create simple décor items that will cost very little to put together. Decoration expenses will vary depending on your choice of materials.

Let's look at what you can plan to spend on plants for each season.

Spring Budget: \$30-\$40

- * **Bulbs-** These can be bought in packages or by bulk. I recommend buying from the bulk bins as you will only need to get a few for your planter. They usually range from around \$0.29 each. Assuming that you get a dozen of each type, Tulips, Daffodils, Crocus and Grape Hyacinth, this will cost approximately \$15.00
- * **Spring Annuals-** Primrose and Pansies are very inexpensive. Plan to buy up to 2-4 of each depending on the size of your planter. They are anywhere from \$0.99 to \$2.99 each based on pot size. Estimate approximately \$15.00 for these.
- * **Mid Spring Filler-** This could be a pre-made basket or a hydrangea, which will run you from \$5.00-\$10.00. Buy the cheapest you can find since it is only a temporary fix meant to last about a month. Estimate \$7.00.

Summer Budget: \$35-\$40

- * **Summer Annuals-** Seed geraniums are usually \$0.99 where zonal are about \$2.99. The difference is that zonal are grown from cuttings and will fill out quicker. If your patient, buy the seed started ones.

Petunia hybrids will cost about \$2.99, make sure they are the trailing type. You will only need 2 – 3 plants.

Other filler annuals range from \$1.99-\$3.99, choose a color scheme and buy within those few colors, you only need a couple.

Ipomea is inexpensive too, get at least 2 to plant in between the petunias.

A Dracena spike will only cost around \$1.99 when they are small. There's no need to get a larger one unless you want an instant look because they grow fast. If you choose to get a fuller grass like the Purple Fountain, they usually start a little higher at \$4.99- \$6.99

- * **Mid Summer Filler-** You may choose not to do this and be happy until fall. But if its been a really hot summer, your annuals might need some replacing. Budget \$10-\$15 if you want to refresh your planter mid season.

Fall Budget: \$25-\$30

As stated in the first chapter, spring begins in fall with your bulbs. I put the bulb budget in spring as that is the season they are intended for.

- * **Fall Annuals-** This is the season you get to borrow from spring and summer. Your Ipomea, Geraniums and grass spike plants will be nice and full.

Add to this a fall mum for about \$4.99-\$8.99, 1 millet or ornamental corn plant for about \$3.99 and if you were really frugal, you can pop your pansies back into your container for a second blooming.

- * **Mid Fall Filler-** These are your pumpkins, gourds and hay bale for decorating. They are included in your fall budget.

Winter Budget: \$0-\$20

If you use yard trimmings and hunt around your neighborhood you can save money by not purchasing greens. Put your dollars into some curly twigs and berried branches. You most likely have some holiday décor items you can use to accessorize your planter and if your planning on creating the tomato cage tree's, buy these in fall when home center's are blowing them out of stock.

One Planter, Four Seasons

Overall, you can expect to spend \$60-\$120 on your planter each year (bulbs will only need to be replaced every 2-3 years).

This is a good value for a constantly changing outdoor display that looks spectacular each season.

Change it up every year with a different color scheme. Perhaps you will plant orange geraniums with blue petunia's or try pink tones with black ipomea for a dramatic affect.

Use these base plants and have fun with their different varieties for years of different looks that you (and your neighbors) will enjoy.

Get creative with recycled materials. Use an old ladder to place spring pots on or decorate a fan rake with a harvest swag to stick into the soil at the back of the fall planter.

The goal is to create maximum interest on a very small budget and this can be done with both plants and accessories.

Have fun and enjoy your planter through-out the year.

About the Author



Shelley Levis is a writer for Sow and Dipity home and garden website, a garden designer and a manager at a vintage retail garden center in British Columbia.

She ran her own garden design business in West Vancouver for nearly a decade using her knowledge as a certified Horticulturist with a degree in Landscape Design.

In recent years, she took on a position as a lead designer at Western Canada's biggest Christmas Store's before settling into her present role as a garden center manager. Her position as a designer and leader is to steer theme development, design over the top displays and coordinate special events.

Her work has been featured in nationwide magazines such as Gardening Magazine, has made cover of GreenCraft and has been picked up by Trendhunter.com. In 2014, she became a selected Michaels Stores blogger, 1 of only 4 chosen in Canada.

More to come...

Currently she is working with Hometalk.com and local Television networks as a featured garden expert. Her next book is in the works and will focus on small space vegetable gardens made from unusual and recycled materials.

You can visit her at [Milner Village Garden Center](http://www.milnervillagegardencenters.com) or enroll in one of her classes where she demonstrates unique garden crafts, small space gardening techniques and seasonal décor.

To see more garden tips and decorating, visit her website at:

<http://www.sowanddipity.com>

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