

GARDENS + LANDSCAPES

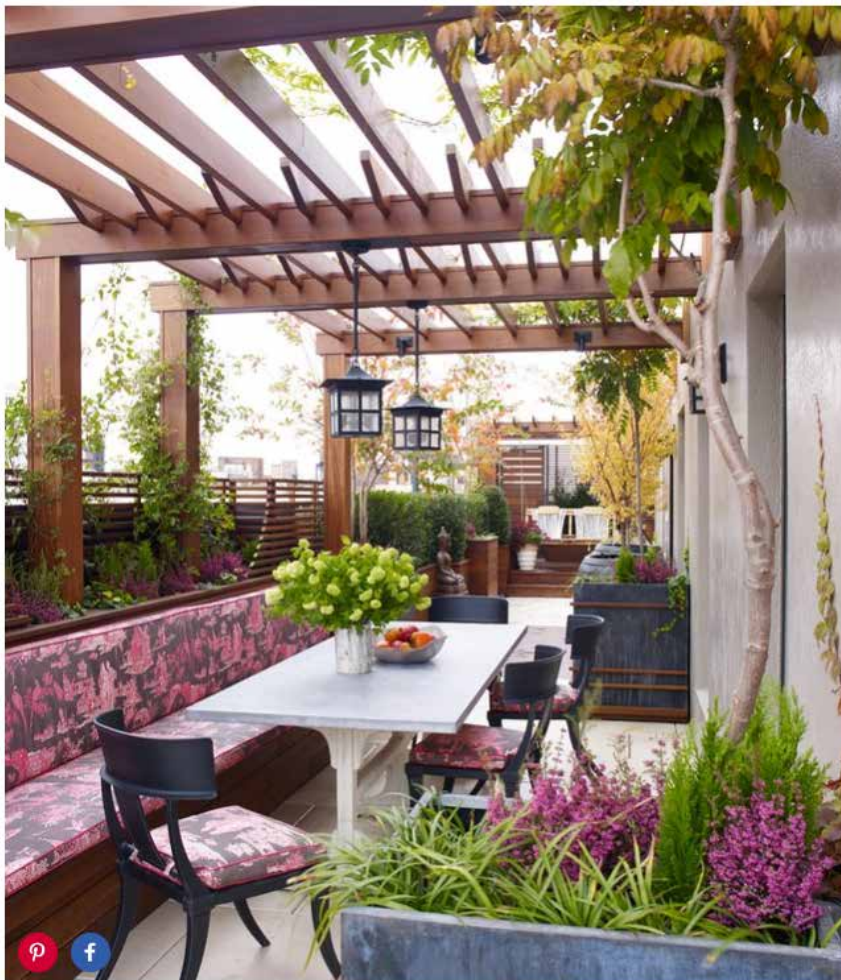
How to Elevate Your Outdoor Space with Potted Plants

These containers are your secret design weapon

TEXT BY [MIRANDA SILVA](#) · Posted August 25, 2016



When people think about designing a garden or [roof terrace](#), they tend to focus on the larger elements, such as trees, planting beds, and furniture. “Potted plants are often overlooked as an option or arrive as an afterthought,” says Alec Gunn, president of New York firm [Gunn Landscape Architecture](#). However, he says, potted plants can be a secret weapon in design, adding dimension and even unexpected drama to an [outdoor space](#). “Pots are incredibly versatile, and can become almost sculptural in and of themselves.” Here, he offers five ways to take potted plants from supporting cast to stars of your yard.



Employ containers to define spaces.

“Just as the interior of a home is divided up into rooms for relaxing, eating, and sleeping, envision your exterior space split into outdoor living areas,” says Gunn. For this city rooftop, long zinc planters with wisteria vines and liriopse act almost as walls between the dining and relaxation areas, while also setting the foundation of the pink-and-green color scheme.



Photo: Peter Murdock/Courtesy of Gunn Landscape Architecture



Go big.

“Think of plants as artists’ tools—material that can be sculpted into aesthetically pleasing shapes,” says Gunn. On this rooftop, the arch of willows, planted in sturdy Pennoyer Newman pots, creates an impactful yet peaceful sense of enclosure—and a welcome bit of shade.



Photo: Courtesy of Gunn Landscape Architecture



Play off the architecture.

“Whether you live in a redbrick house, an industrial converted condo, or a home with wood siding, use complementary materials and palettes for your pots,” says Gunn. The shingles on this house in East Hampton, for example, provided the inspiration for the texture and color of the terra-cotta pots filled with salvia. On the flip side, a more modern house may call for industrial-style stainless-steel planters.



Photo: Alex Herring/Courtesy of Gunn Landscape Architecture



Change it up.

In this yard, matching clay pots in different sizes are dynamic but still cohesive. The pots were tiered and planted with a variety of cascading and structured greenery to provide variety. Switch plants out seasonally “for added interest and to provide outdoor color year-round,” says Gunn.



Photo: Paul Warchol/Courtesy of Gunn Landscape Architecture



Build pots into the landscape.

“If you are opting for a terrace, consider the addition of a potted area for trees, shrubs, or perennials, complete with drainage holes,” says Gunn. For this small townhouse garden, the built-in potted section breaks up the large swath of hardscape.