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Planting Around Patios

No matter how new or old, your patio or deck won't look complete until you add some plants

by LYNN OCONE

Picture the front of your house without any shrubs, trees or flowers. Pretty stark and dreary. Yet even folks who take pride in their green thumb forget what plants can do to their decks and patios. Plants complete these structures. They beautify, provide shade and privacy, and separate activity areas. They also soften the edges of these hardscapes and help them blend in with the rest of the yard.

Even if there's nothing growing around your outdoor-living area, it isn't hard to make some changes. There are hundreds of plants to choose from and many ways to incorporate them.

PLACES FOR PLANTS

Container plants are the easiest way to enliven a drab corner or soften a hard expanse of paving or wood. You can move these pots around and change plantings whenever you like.

To create an instant focal point, use a half whiskey barrel planted with a small tree,



Michael S. Thompson

IF SPACE IS TIGHT ON your raised deck, hang planter boxes filled with annuals that will bloom throughout the spring and summer over a railing. Here, petunias and marigolds brighten a deck.

such as Japanese maple or dwarf citrus. Or, group several smaller containers of varied sizes together as a display. Professional landscapers suggest groups of uneven numbers for the most striking composition. You can overdo it, though. Too many small containers tend to create a busy look, and they make more work of watering.

When space is limited, display containers on a deck railing or on a pergola or arbor. On a shady wall, attach several pots filled with begonias, impatiens and English ivy. Stagger pots at different heights so it does not look too formal. Place a few on steps leading to the yard to soften the transition.

Garden centers and mail-order catalogs carry a wide selection of hardware made for attaching and suspending containers (see "Patio Plant Help," on page 40). Just make certain the support you choose can bear the weight of the planted and watered container. And, display hanging baskets high enough so no one walks into them.

Built-in planters. You can offer plants a permanent home and create order on a



Karen Bussini ©

PERIMETER PLANTINGS AT THE corners anchor this simple brick patio. The notch in the center forms a planting pocket for herbs and flowers.

Design by Gail Lawrence and Shannon Finley



Patio Plant Help



Plants on and near a patio or deck are always noticeable, so it's important to keep them in good shape. Pots and planters don't contain a lot of soil, so regular fertilizing and watering are essential. In addition, snip off any dead foliage or flowers once they've faded. Dead-heading, as it's called, encourages many plants to keep blooming.

Here's a sampling of essential tools and useful accessories to display plants and ease maintenance:

The CobraCo Plant Caddy (around \$14) easily moves potted plants while protecting the deck surface. It holds a 14-in. pot weighing up to 200 lbs.

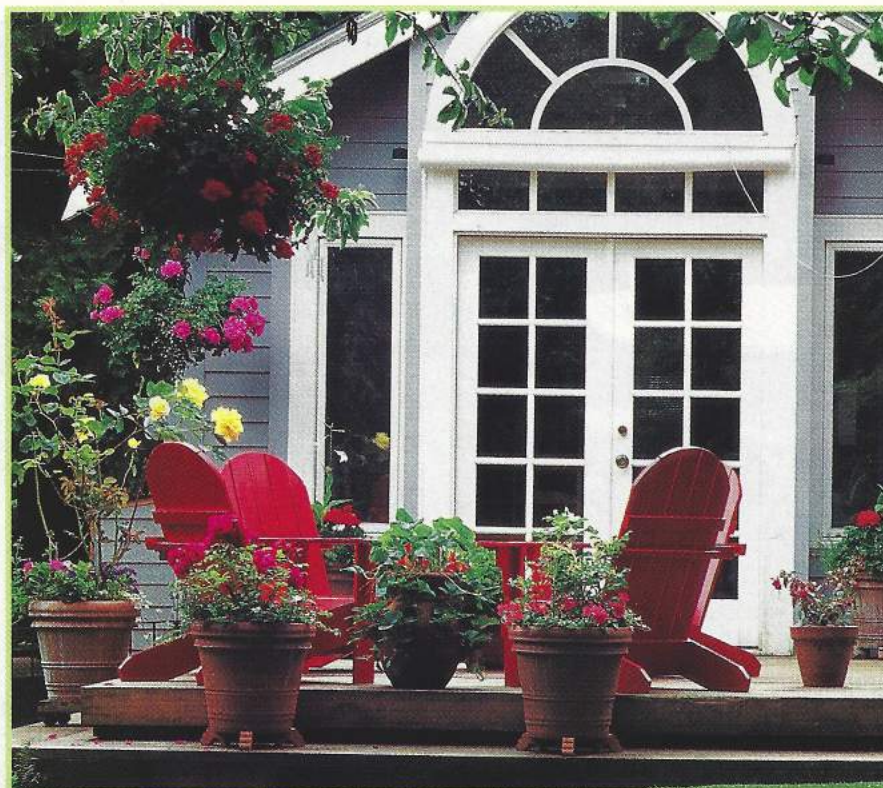
1. The Kinsman Railing Crane (about \$27) supports hanging plants and clamps to deck railings from 1¼ to 1½ in. thick. 2. The Langenbach Retractable Hanger (about \$15) lets you raise and lower plants with ease. 3. The CobraCo 14-in. English Flat Wire Basket (about \$20) is lined with a decorative coconut-fiber insert. 4. The Nelson 36-in. Spray Nozzle Wand (about \$13) puts plants in easy reach for watering.



1. PlasTerra 17-in. Terrazzo Planter (about \$30) resists cracking and is 80 percent lighter than terra cotta. 2. Kinsman clay Victorian Pot Feet (set of 3, about \$4) raise pots off the ground to provide air circulation and prevent staining and rotting. 3. A.M. Leonard's Haws Traditional Galvanized Steel Watering Can (about \$68) holds 2 gal. and has two handgrips. 4. A.M. Leonard's

Super Scooper Giant Dustpan (about \$14) measures 11×16 in., ideal for use with a rake or push broom.

1. Langenbach 3-ft.-long Cypress Rail Planter (about \$70) snugly fits onto a 2×4 or 2×6 railing and holds 8-in.-dia. pots. 2. Kinsman Rain-Mats (about \$4.50 for four 7-in. square mats) placed in pots before planting reduce watering frequency by creating a reservoir for roots at the bottom of containers. 3. The Raindrip Container Drip Watering Kit (about \$22 with antisiphon) contains everything you need to water potted plants, hanging baskets and planter boxes just by turning on the spigot. 4. Stanley's AccuScape 7-in. Slim Blade Pruner (about \$18) with scissor-action blades is ideal for grooming and shaping small plants.



Michael S. Thompson

THE CONTAINERS AT THE edge and on the step of this deck create an informal enclosed area, but at the same time they help the deck blend with the rest of the yard. Lush hanging baskets add colorful accents.

deck or patio with built-in planters. Thick-walled planters also insulate the soil, keeping roots cool and soil moist.

Consider making your planter high enough to eliminate squatting or kneeling when planting and weeding. Add a wide cap to the planter and it doubles as a bench.

Built-in planters need drainage. Those with a closed bottom require an interior trough to catch water or weep holes on the sides. The planter also needs to be at least 18 to 24 in. deep so roots have room to grow. In contrast, an open-bottom planter allows for unrestricted root growth and drainage.

Perimeter plantings. Use plantings bordering the deck to make it feel like part of the surrounding yard or to set off the entire area. Here's one scheme for a raised deck: Plant deck-high shrubs or trees around the perimeter of a deck; follow with lower-growing shrubs and ground cover in front to form a gradual sweep of greenery from the ground up.

For a ground-level patio, allow plants to billow over paving edges. This softens

hard edges and corners, making the entire area appear more natural.

Choose plants that are in scale with the structure, and strive for year-round appeal by using evergreens to provide a basic all-season framework. Create seasonal color with annuals and perennials.

Planting in paving. Plant in gaps between patio pavers to add color and soften a large expanse of paving. You can even remove the occasional paving slab to make room for plants.

Suitable plants include perennials that are low-growing and can tolerate tough conditions, including restricted root growth, drought and light foot traffic. Creeping thyme, which offers the added reward of a delicious fragrance, is a popular choice.

MADE IN THE SHADE

While a sun-baked deck may be appealing in the cooler months, shade is essential in hot weather. Trees and vine-clad arbors are practical ways to gain some relief from the sun.

Trees. When space allows, a deciduous tree—planted to the south or west side of

Learn more about patio plantings in "Where to Find It," on page 94.



Roger Foley

EVERGREEN SHRUBS, flowering perennials and ornamental grasses create a view from the patio with year-round appeal.

Design by Barbara Katz/London Landscapes

the patio—will provide shade on summer afternoons. In winter, bare branches let the sun warm the patio and brighten the house.

When constructing a new deck or patio, consider leaving an open space between deck sections or blocks of paving to plant a tree. Keep in mind that this tree well must accommodate the girth of the tree and its roots at maturity.

Avoid trees with roots that will lift paving or damage your lawn. Likewise, choose trees that are relatively tidy so rak-

ing and sweeping are kept to a minimum. See a list of suggested patio trees at right.

Vines. If you don't have space for trees, consider adding an arbor, trellis or pergola covered with vines like wisteria or honeysuckle. These structures enable you to shade the entire deck or just a portion of it.

Most vines are fast-growing and take up little ground space. Consider, too, that select vines, such as deciduous clematis and wisteria, grow successfully in containers when open ground is unavailable.

Make sure any vine you choose has adequate support and will not destroy whatever it climbs on. To avoid constant pruning, choose a vine that fits the allotted space.

SCREEN AND PROTECT

Plants are the best way to make a patio or deck feel private and protected from wind without a sense of confinement.

Wind protection. Better than a solid wall that blocks air and reflects sun glare, a hedge planted perpendicular to the pre-

GROUND-COVER PLANTS between pavers bring life to a desert patio edged with water-thrifty perennials.



Saxon Holt

9 Choice Trees For Patios

These small trees (from 20 to 35 ft. high at maturity) are compatible with decks and patios. Their roots won't pry up paving or invade the lawn, and though all but the fruitless olive drop leaves in fall, none are excessively messy. Check with your local nursery to ensure the tree you are considering is adapted to your climate.

- Cornelian cherry
- Crape myrtle
- Eastern redbud
- Japanese maple
- Japanese snowdrop tree, also called Japanese snowbell (*Styrax japonicus*)
- Raywood ash
- Silverbell
- 'Swan Hill' fruitless olive
- 'Purple Pony' dwarf flowering plum