

# Pots of glorious winter colour

The ingredients are simple but the effect can be impressive. Choose plants for colour and texture and they'll see you through until late spring

**Chris Heavey**  
Lecturer at the Teagasc  
College at the National  
Botanic Gardens



**T**he colour pallet is up to you but the colour red tends to get "old" the minute the new year's bells toll. Consider purples and magenta teamed with lighter green foliage, which will last for weeks and weeks. Plant choices are easy because there are only a few to choose from and that takes the stress out of it.

Cyclamen is great for longevity, provided you deadhead. Deadheading is simple and it really encourages continuous flowering. Take out the faded flower right down to the base of the plant, taking off the faded bloom at the top. The stem can look unsightly so take the whole stem out.

Cyclamen are particular about your watering technique, preferring to be watered at the base, underneath the leaves, rather than from overhead. If you give them what they need they will repay you with continuous flowering until late spring.

I'm a big fan of using ferns in plant-



Double flowered Helleborus in combination with ferns.

ers together with Cyclamen. Ferns provide a great backdrop to show off the colour of the flowers. Hellebores are also great companions as they can flower from late winter until late spring. Viola are a great filler plant and really get going in April, but plant them now so they can fill out.

Heathers are also a good choice but remember to use ericaceous compost and if you are living in an area where the water is limey use rain water instead of tap water and the heathers will be much happier.

## Boost

Most composts have a three- to six-month feed and that's perfectly fine for overwintering plants. You can add a slow-release fertiliser to give the planter a boost as we come into April.

If you want to acknowledge the transition into spring then just plant in some early flowering narcissus to add more interest. Choose the smaller flowering varieties that won't overpower the display.

Smaller varieties of tulip, keeping the height to no more than 30cm, will

also give added interest to a planting display. If you really want to get fancy, and provided the pots are large enough, you could use a half standard lollipop Taxus or Ligustrum and under plant with the Cyclamen, ferns and Hellebore.

Having a bit of height in a large planter can be hugely impressive and allows you to experiment with different plant combinations.

Keeping everything in a pot, healthy and pest free, can be a bit tricky but vigilance and keeping up with the watering will go a long way to keeping it all looking beautiful.

Narcissus 'Tete a Tete' or 'New Baby', Tulipa 'Fringed Fancy' or 'Sundance' and Crocus 'Ruby Giant' or 'Jeanne d'Arc' are ideal for a pot. A little drainage in the form of horticultural sand or grit will help. Plant at least three times the depth of the bulb.

Get the planters organised early as the colour choices get quite limited as we get the closer to December. You know what they say: "When they're gone they're gone."



Cyclamen in a winter interest pot.