



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION

New Trial Tropical Container Gardens

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With increased urbanization, container gardens continue to enjoy popularity and brighten up patios and balconies. For many reasons, tropical plants have become a staple in container gardens traditionally filled with herbaceous annuals, bulbs, succulents, perennials and woody plants. First, they have undeniable foliage appeal with their colorful and richly textured leaves, even in the absence of flowers. Second, they have high plant performance, particularly in the South, where high heat and humidity often combine with drought to present a serious challenge to ornamental gardening. This can be especially true for container gardens, where plant roots have limited soil space to access water and nutrients and large day-to-day fluctuations in soil moisture and nutrients occur, which may adversely affect optimal growth and flowering. Carefully consider plant selection based on whether the plants can not only withstand but also perform satisfactorily under normal stressful container conditions.

Many plants considered tender perennials and tropicals actually hold up very well under challenging conditions, and can tolerate extremes of heat, humidity and moisture. Some are uniquely adapted to low-light environments and thus can be used in containers suited for shaded areas. These plants are traditionally used as interiorscape plants but have shown much potential for outdoor use in the summer as well. Others can tolerate or even thrive in full sun.

At the University of Georgia, we continually trial new plant material and share information with the public on superior-performing plants placed in aesthetically pleasing combinations. This publication discusses container gardens composed exclusively of tropical foliage material.

Container Recipes

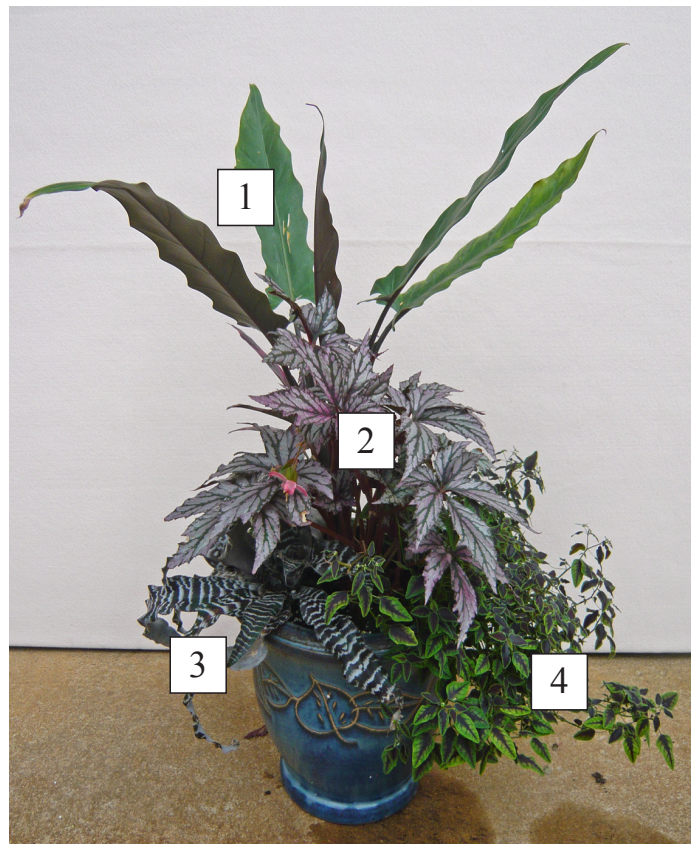
The following container gardens have been created and maintained at the University of Georgia campus in Griffin, Ga. The containers used were either 24 inches or 36 inches in diameter, and made of glazed clay, textured foam plastic or double-wall plastic. Containers were planted in a bark-based commercial mix in late April or early May, 2009, and supplemented with a slow-release fertilizer and a water-retention agent. Both common and scientific plant names are provided below.

The following photos are of 24-inch containers and represent variations on a theme; that is, the same plant varieties are present but in different combinations. A back view of the container is on left while photos of the front are on the right. Numbers and corresponding plant names are given below the photos. Photos were taken three weeks after planting.

Note the placement and plant habit in the container (right): upright habit in center (1) and (2), low habit near edge (3), and sprawling, trailing habit over edge (4).

Containers were watered twice per week and fertilized with 2 tablespoons (24-inch container), or 8 tablespoons (36-inch container) of slow-release fertilizer.

The following is a list of species and cultivars illustrated throughout the publication.

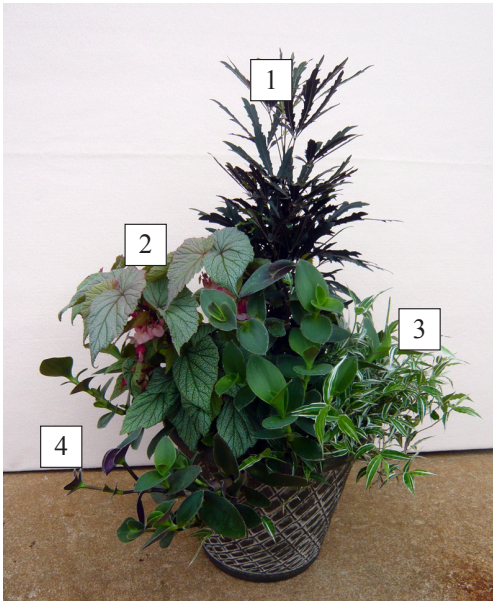


Species and Cultivars “At-a-Glance”

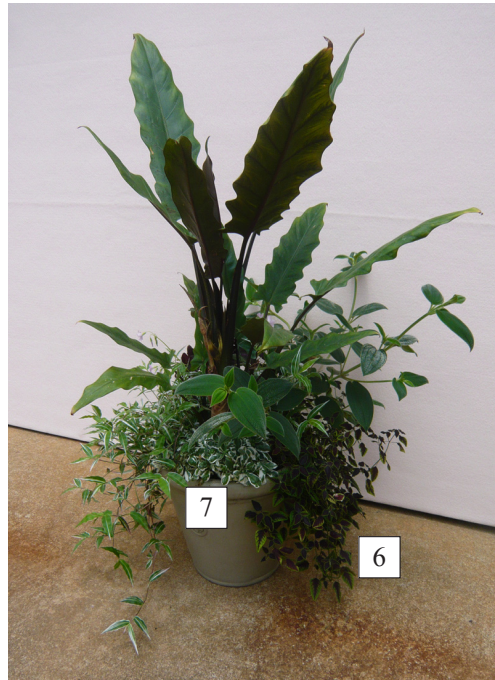
Alocasia lauterbachiana (Elephant ear)
Alternanthera ‘Snowball’
Acalypha cristata (Copperleaf plant)
Acalypha wilkesiana ‘Raggedy Ann’
Alocasia ‘Aurora’
Alocasia wentii variegated (Elephant ear)
Alternanthera ‘Crème de Menthe’
Begonia ‘Benitochiba’
Begonia sp. (Silver leaf begonia)
Caladium sp.
Caladium ‘Mini White’
Chlorophytum comosum (Spider plant)
Coleus ‘Twirl-a-Whirl’
Croton ‘Picasso’
Croton ‘Petra’
Cryptanthus ‘Black Mystic’
Dizygotheca (False aralia)
Dracaena deremensis ‘Lemon Lime’
Euphorbia ‘Diamond Frost’
Euphorbia ‘Flameleaf’
Ficus elastica (Rubber plant)
Fuchsia ‘Coralie’ (Coral Fuchsia)
Heuchera ‘Flameleaf’
Hoya carnosa vaiegata (Variegated wax plant)
Hypoestes sp. (Polka-dot plant)
Impatiens repens (Creeping impatiens)
Kentia (Kentia palm)
Ledebouria socialis (Leopard plant)
Leymus arenarius ‘Glaucus’ (Blue Lyme grass)

Muehlenbeckia (Wire vine)
Musa ‘Siam Ruby’ (Ornamental banana)
Neoregelia sp. (Purple neoregelia)
Nephrolepis ‘Rita’s Gold’ (Rita’s Gold Boston fern)
Oxalis regnellii (Purple shamrock)
Oxalis siliquosa (South American oxalis)
Peperomia puteolata (Puteolata peperomia)
Pilea grandifolia ‘Coral’
Pilea glauca ‘Aquamarine’
Phaius tankervilleae (Nun’s orchid)
Phormium sp.
Phormium tenax atropurpureum (Phormium)
Talinum paniculatum (Variegated Jewels of Opal)
Tibouchina urvilleana (Brazilian spider flower)
Trachelospermum asiaticum ‘Winter Beauty’
 (Variegated Asiatic jasmine)
Tradescantia fluminensis (Purple-leaf tradescantia)
Tradescantia sp. (Variegated small leaf tradescantia)
Tradescantia sp. (Trailing tradescantia)
Platynerium bifurcatum (Staghorn fern)
Pseudoranthemum atropurpureum
Rusella ‘Peter’s Carpet’
Sanchezia (Caricature plant)
Sedum linearis
Sedum sp. (Golden variegated sedum)
Syngonium ‘Neon’
Xanthosoma ‘Dwarf Green’
Xanthosoma ‘Lime Zinger’ (Elephant ear)

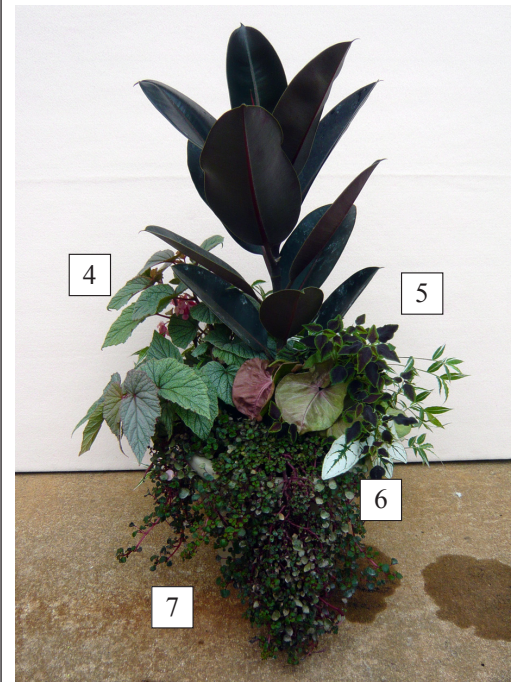
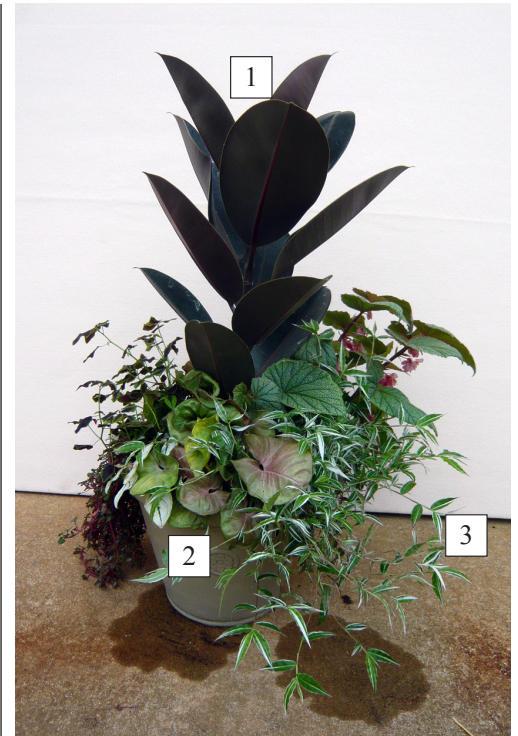
Combinations for Sun/Part Shade



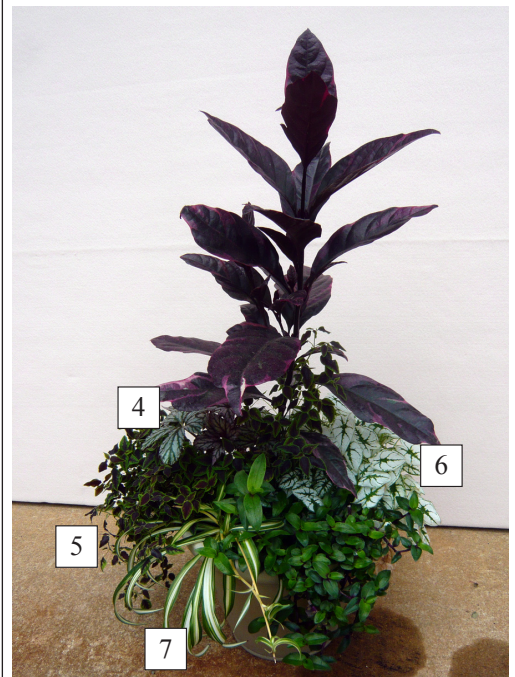
- 1-*Dizygotheca* (False aralia)
- 2-*Begonia* sp. (Silver leaf begonia)
- 3-*Tradescantia* sp.
(*Tradescantia* variegated small leaf)
- 4-*Tradescantia* sp.
(Trailing tradescantia)
- 5-*Peperomia puteolata*
(Puteolata peperomia)
- 6-*Cryptanthus* 'Black Mystic'



- 1-*Alocasia lauterbachiana*
(Elephant ear)
- 2-*Tibouchina urvilleana*
(Brazilian spider flower)
- 3-*Tradescantia* sp.
(Variegated small leaf tradescantia)
- 4-*Oxalis regnellii* (Purple shamrock)
- 5-*Caladium* 'Mini White'
- 6-*Euphorbia* 'Flameleaf'
- 7-*Alternanthera* 'Snowball'



- 1-*Ficus elastica* (Rubber plant)
- 2-*Synгонium* 'Neon'
- 3-*Tradescantia* sp.
(Variegated small leaf tradescantia)
- 4-*Begonia* sp. (Silver leaf begonia)
- 5-*Euphorbia* 'Flameleaf'
- 6-*Caladium* 'Mini White'
- 7-*Impatiens repens*
(Creeping impatiens)



- 1-*Neoregelia* sp. (Purple neoregelia)
- 2-*Begonia* 'Benitochiba'
- 3-*Tradescantia* sp.
(Variegated small leaf tradescantia)
- 4-*Syngonium* 'Neon'
- 5-*Tradescantia* sp.
(Trailing tradescantia)
- 6-*Tibouchina urvilleana*
(Brazilian spider flower)
- 7-*Euphorbia* 'Diamond Frost'
- 8-*Euphorbia* 'Flameleaf'
- 9-*Caladium* 'Mini White'
- 10-*Hypoestes* sp. (Polka-dot plant)

- 1-*Pseudoranthemum atropurpureum*
- 2-*Platycerium bifurcatum*
(Staghorn fern)
- 3-*Tradescantia fluminensis*
(Purple-leaf tradescantia)
- 4-*Begonia* 'Benitochiba'
- 5-*Euphorbia* 'Flameleaf'
- 6-*Caladium* 'Mini White'
- 7-*Chlorophytum comosum*
(Spider plant)

Combinations for Sun*

The following photos are of larger 36-inch combination gardens. Although all plant species planted were tolerant of full sun, the sides of some of the containers were exposed to shade (near the building) while the rest of the plants in the pot received full sun. In such cases, plants that received less light failed to develop the intense coloration for which their foliage is known (e.g. Caricature plant, *Sanchezia*, is characterized by intense gold veins on an emerald-green background). This is a typical plant response to growth under different light levels. Although most grass species require full sun for fast and maximum growth, we found that *Phormium tenax atropurpureum* (Phormium) and *Leymus arenarius* 'Glaucus' (Blue Lyme grass) did grow in shade. In fact, especially with the Blue Lyme grass, the growth rate was diminished to match that of other plants in the container, thus keeping it in better balance.

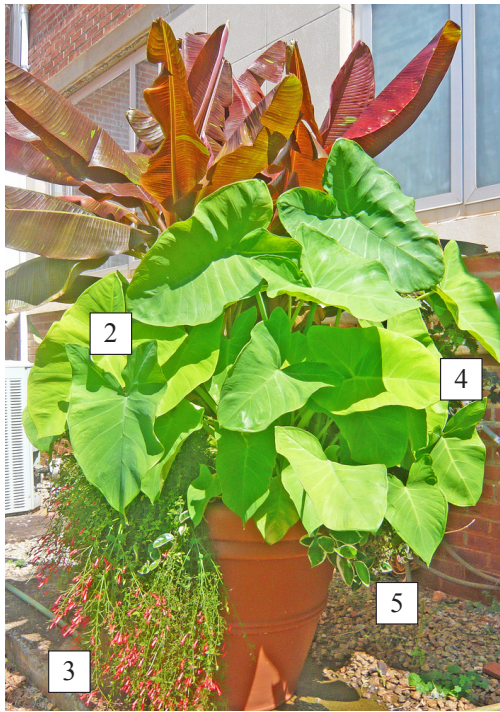
Photos of the 36-inch containers were taken between two and three months after planting. Without exception, plants grew very well. Regular maintenance included watering two to three times per week and fertilizing with a slow-release fertilizer. Weekly maintenance also included removing dead foliage/flowers and trimming excess growth. For the most part, species had similar growth rates. Exceptions were Ornamental bananas, *Xanthosoma* and *Kentia* palm, which had a faster growth rate and needed more frequent leaf removal to maintain balance with the rest of the plants in the container.



1-*Dracaena deremensis* 'Lemon Lime'
 2-*Xanthosoma* 'Dwarf Green'
 3-*Croton* 'Picasso'
 4-*Sedum linearis*



1-*Musa* 'Siam Ruby'
 (Ornamental banana)
 2-*Xanthosoma* 'Lime Zinger'
 (Elephant ear)
 3-*Fuchsia* 'Coral' (Coral Fuchsia)
 4-*Sanchezia* (Caricature plant)*
 (under low light foliage develops
 more green coloration)
 5-*Pilea grandifolia* 'Coral'*
 (under low light foliage loses its
 copper coloration)



- 1-*Musa* 'Siam Ruby'
(Ornamental banana)
- 2-*Xanthosoma* 'Lime Zinger'
(Elephant ear)
- 3-*Rusella* 'Peter's Carpet'
- 4-*Coleus* 'Twirl-a-Whirl'
- 5-*Hoya carnosa vaiegata*
(Variegated wax plant)
- 6-*Oxalis siliquosa*
(South American oxalis)

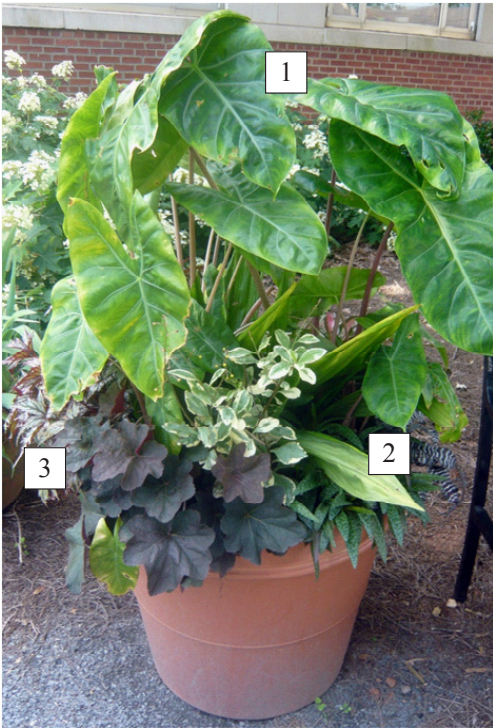


- 1-*Kentia* (Kentia palm)
- 2-*Nephrolepis* 'Rita's Gold'
(Rita's Gold Boston fern)
- 3-*Trachelospermum asiaticum*
'Winter Beauty' (Variegated Asiatic
jasmine)
- 4-*Phormium tenax atropurpureum*
(Phormium)
- 5-*Croton* 'Petra'
- 6-*Acalypha cristata* (Copperleaf plant)
- 7-*Sedum* sp.
(Golden variegated sedum)

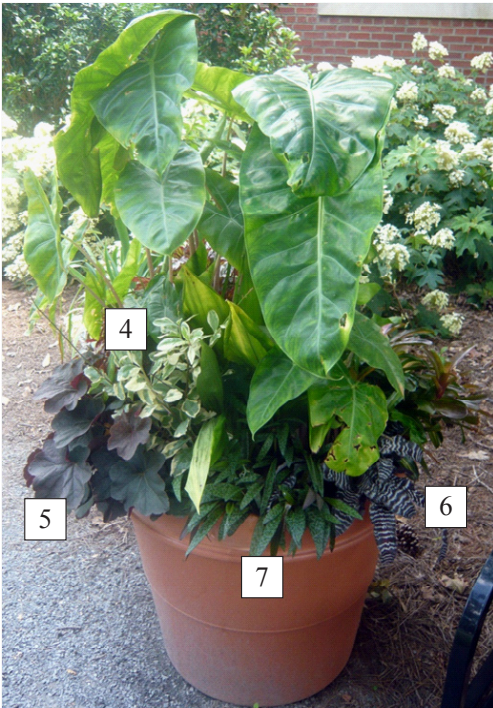


- 1-*Kentia* (Kentia palm)
- 2-*Sanchezia* (Caricature plant)*
(under high light foliage develops
more gold coloration)
- 3-*Acalypha wilkesiana* 'Raggedy Ann'
(Purple-leaf tradescantia)
- 4-*Muehlenbeckia* (Wire vine)
- 5-*Sedum* sp.
(Golden variegated sedum)
- 6-*Phormium tenax atropurpureum*
(Phormium)
- 7-*Alternanthera* 'Crème de Menthe'

Combinations for Shade



- 1-*Alocasia wentii* variegated (Elephant ear)
- 2-*Caladium* sp.
- 3-*Phormium* sp.
- 4-*Leymus arenarius* 'Glaucus'
(Blue Lyme grass)
- 5-*Tradescantia* sp. (Trailing tradescantia)
- 6-*Euphorbia* 'Flameleaf'
- 7-*Pilea glauca* 'Aquamarine'



- 1-*Alocasia* 'Aurora'
- 2-*Phaius tankervilleae* (Nun's orchid)
- 3-*Begonia* 'Benitochiba'
- 4-*Talinum paniculatum*
(Variegated Jewels of Opal)
- 5-*Heuchera* 'Flameleaf'
- 6-*Ledebouria socialis* (Leopard plant)
- 7-*Cryptanthus* 'Black Mystic'

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Circular 1361

Reviewed October 2022

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