

African Festive Pots by Jenny Dean

Celebrating our African heritage with some beautiful local beauties.

Open any garden magazine looking for Christmas ideas and red and white plants and flowers leap out at you – we still seem to be stuck on the idea of a Eurocentric Christmas! This month we have decided that we prefer an African Christmas and have come up with some stunning ideas for festive pots.

Editor Anno and I had great fun with a varied collection of pots gathered from her garden. Pots can be very expensive, so we didn't go this route at all... and used existing containers giving them a lick of paint where needed and making the most of what we had. Recycling at its best!

A shady yet bright space is brightened up by lime green *Cyperus prolifer* (Dwarf Papyrus) fronted with *Plectranthus* "Mona Lavender" – a glorious purple, offset with yellow leaved *Plectranthus* "Sasha". Much taken with purple, we took a *Streptocarpus* (Cape primrose) and surrounded it with *Isolepis prolifera* – a lovely little sedge/ grass which loves the damp conditions also enjoyed by the primrose. Still looking for ideas for the shade we used an old trough brightened up with a smudgy green and filled it with a form of *Plectranthus zuluensis*. This unusual Plec has purple stems, blue flowers and variegated leaves. You see it in the pictures perfectly partnered with *Pelargonium tongaense*.

An old container was given a fresh look with a coat of bright blue paint then filled with *Bulbine abyssinica* and dwarf blue *Agapanthus* ...with breathtaking effect. Once again we took an old trough painted in our favourite green and filled it with variegated *Tulbaghia* and bright orange *Gazania* – so simple and effective.

As the best plant around for storing carbon dioxide and cleaning the air we really wanted to use *Portulacaria afra*, the Spekboom. It is a handsome plant, never untidy and superb in a pot. We added some yellow flowered *Bergeranthus multiceps* or *scapiger* to tumble over the edge. You could use any of the *Lampranthus* sp. which would work just as well.

A low flat pot bedecked with a clay lizard was filled with White ladies – *Kalanchoe thyrsiflora*. Hot and dry suits this plant perfectly as the colours intensify in the dryness. While using succulents, we fell in love with this combination: the Cat's Tail, *Asparagus densiflorus* 'Meyersii', surrounded by a delicate *Crassula expansa* subsp. *fragilis*. Tiny white flowers adorn the plant for months on end looking like tiny snowflakes.

So there you have it – our choice for African festive pots, let us celebrate our African heritage and enjoy our local beauties.