

Dressing up pots

Mark Rayner suggests ways to give pots quick makeovers using pasting and painting techniques.

MOST of us have a few old terracotta pots lurking in the shed that, as long as they aren't cracked or chipped, can be given a new lease of life with a lick of paint or other simple decorative techniques.

New terracotta pots can also be given a makeover – and can make good and relatively inexpensive gifts (Mother's Day is not far away).

As with most DIY jobs, preparation is the key and as long as your terracotta pots are correctly prepared prior to decorating, their new look should last for years.

First it's imperative the pot is thoroughly clean and dry. Use warm soapy water and a scouring pad for old grubby pots. If they have been left outside for any length of time, it may also be a good idea to treat them with a proprietary moss and mould killer – check with your local paint supplier for the right product and always follow manufacturer's recommendations for the best results.

It's advisable to wash new terracotta pots too, first peeling off any sticky price labels and removing gum residue with white or methylated spirit. It may also be necessary to scour any really stubborn residue with an abrasive cleaner or steel wool.

Once the pot is clean and dry, seal it thoroughly with an appropriate sealer. Resene do a very good water-based terracotta sealer that also acts as a primer so you don't need an undercoat with it. Sealing the pot like this ensures no moisture can leach through the porous terracotta from inside the pot and damage the outer paint surface – the paint on unsealed pots can quickly bubble or flake off. Follow manufacturer's instructions regarding application of the sealer and allow it to dry thoroughly before decorating your pot.

Pasting and painting

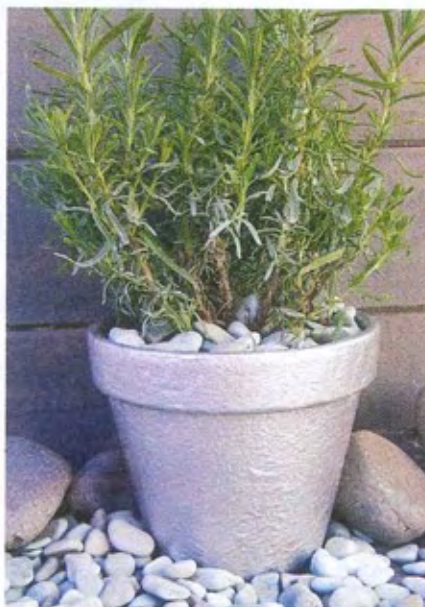
WHEN it comes to decorating your pot, two easy, relatively quick options to consider are pasting and painting or a combination of both techniques.

Objects suitable for pasting include shells, rope, or other small items that come to hand, even flat fancy buttons or shapes cut out of tin cans. Use exterior PVA to fix these. On very smooth objects you plan to paint, first brush a thin layer of the glue as a key on the surface to be painted and let it dry very thoroughly.

When it comes to painting up your pot, again, always choose an appropriate outdoor paint. Testpots of exterior house paint are ideal for decorating terracotta pots, and they come in a huge range of colours. The paint can be applied by brush or mini-roller, or, for more intriguing effects, the paint can be sponged, stippled or even stencilled on. Other types of paint to consider using include textured paints (these contain a type of grit, causing the paint to take on an attractive roughened finish) and metallic paints (these can be sprayed on or applied with a small paint roller) – these two types of paint look especially effective when combined.

Just as preparation is important, so too are the finishing touches. Consider further protecting any painted pots with a coat or two of exterior varnish (Resene does an excellent outdoor varnish that actually filters out any fading UV rays, ensuring the paint colours stay brighter for longer).

To create this look, wind thick garden twine round a terracotta pot, using a generous layer of exterior PVA glue to fix it. For extra durability, seal the twine once the glue is dry with two coats of exterior water-based varnish.



This metallic pot was first painted with textured exterior house paint that was dabbed on with an old brush to create an uneven surface. It was then finished with an exterior silver paint applied with a small roller.



This retro-looking herb pot is easy to create with two testpots of lighter and darker orange. For added durability, finish off with a satin finish water-based varnish.



Use flower colours as inspiration – this vibrant cyclamen looks perfect in its swirly pink pot.



A cheerful clump of pot mums inspired the simple daisy motif on this painted terracotta pot.