

HOME & GARDEN

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Mixing materials for stylish kitchen sur

BY DIERDRE O'SHEA
Copley News Service

Countertops are integral design elements in the modern kitchen. In everything from high-end stone slabs to the latest laminates, there are new color options and finishes created for the artful mixing of materials, textures and colors.

Beyond the look of a material, a homeowner needs to consider its characteristics. Easy-care granite still requires resealing about once a year, while cool marble is more porous and somewhat fragile. Stainless steel is nonporous, antibacterial and won't stain. Wood is great for cutting, as is stone.

Mixing materials means homeowners can have the best of all worlds.

"I personally like to see something different from the countertops on the backsplash," said Amanda Reilly, designer for The Kitchen Source, a Dallas company that specializes in kitchen design and remodeling.

"We're seeing a little bit more metal coming into play," Reilly said.

Stainless steel blends well with many colors and new finishes hide scratches and fingerprints.

The backsplash can be a place to introduce color, create a mosaic-tile design or splurge on more costly



Above, Wilsonart has created its new Roca Collection of laminate to simulate an aged look. It's available in six earthy color combinations that resemble well-worn stone. Right, mixing materials means homeowners can have the best of both worlds. Granite remains a top choice for a luxurious look on the countertop, while the backsplash can be a place to introduce color with a mosaic-tile design.

materials.

"We've done handmade ceramic glazed-tile in vibrant colors for a backsplash, with maybe a metal liner to create a point of interest," she said.

Kitchen islands are also being used for contrast.

"A lot of it depends on the scale of the space," Reilly said. "This would look out of place in a small kitchen."

Granite, marble, slate and limestone tiles for all areas can be up to half the price



of using stone slabs. Tiles stand up to heat and moisture, but a tile countertop won't be perfectly smooth and grout can stain.

American Marazzi Tile replicates natural stone products at a fraction of the cost. Marazzi recently introduced Solaris glazed ceramic tile with a smooth, distressed surface and color choices of ginger, saffron and nutmeg.

"Customers are requesting a twist on the granite

slab, with a very honed surface, almost like it's been sand-blasted," Reilly said. "Almost like you'd walk into the forest and find it there. A butcher-block island coordinates nicely."

This "Old World European or Mediterranean" feel, as Reilly calls it, is part of Americans' infatuation with distressed, weathered surfaces. Manufacturers have created other materials to get the look for less.

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Container gardens hold great appeal to a variety of gard

BY CAROL SOUTH
Special to the Record-Eagle

Renters, retirees and gardeners short on time or space can get their fresh vegetable fix thanks to container gardens.

A few pots or buckets, some transplants, lots of water and a dollop of TLC can yield a satisfying harvest. All while avoiding some tedious in-ground garden chores such as tilling, weeding, mulching and raking.

After more than 40 years tending a large vegetable garden at his home, Carson Bonn moved to a senior apartment in 2003. Last spring, determined to have some fresh vegetables, he gathered an odd assortment of pots and planted tomatoes and peppers on the balcony. This year, the World War II veteran planted cherry tomatoes and green peppers, two containers of each plant, plus one pot each of basil and parsley.

He eagerly anticipates harvesting home grown treats by August from his balcony in Elmwood Township.

"I've always enjoyed a garden. I grew up in a small community and my granddad always had a garden and I guess it rubbed off," said Bonn, who also has pots of begonias, asters, petunias and impatiens on his 8-foot by 10-foot balcony. "When I moved here I wanted to see things grow."

Noting that his tomato

plants are very leggy, Bonn struggles with a shaded western exposure that gets direct sun only in the late afternoon. Nevertheless, this veteran gardener coaxes his plants along with future dinners in mind.

"I cook. I don't know how good I am but I eat it," said Bonn. "I like to bring dinner out on the balcony and sit down at the table."

Because of his low-sun balcony, Bonn typically waters his container garden every other day. This is counter to the rule of thumb that container gardens require extra water to keep the plants from drying out or overheating.

"You've got to just water it, that's all," said Shirley Bowen, a master gardener who staffs a gardening phone line at Michigan State University's Traverse City Extension Office. "You're going to have to water them once or twice a day."

Plants growing in containers also need adequate drainage. In addition to making sure each container has holes in the bottom, gardeners often line them with rocks before putting on the soil.

Maxcella Latimore of Traverse City has a different approach for her container garden. A renter who has had a container garden for four years, Latimer uses last year's plants to help with drainage.

"I fold them down and put

them in the bottom and fold a newspaper over it; it is not as heavy as rocks," said Latimer, who estimates she has more than 50 containers, mostly of flowers. "You can also use plastic peanuts instead of it. Newspaper also helps eliminate weeds."

Latimer, whose container garden will be the first of its type to be on the annual Friendly Garden Club Garden Walk in July, grows a mix of perennials and annuals every year. Besides a rainbow of flowers, she grows a smattering of vegetables, including tomatoes, cucumbers and zucchini.

An inveterate recycler who harvests many of her containers from neighbor's discards, Latimer put three tomato plants in an old tire. Her cucumber is planted in a bushel basket topped with a teepee made of sticks for the vines. She also has some flowers in an old wheelbarrow, cherry lugs, a coal scuttle and metal tubs.

"You can have a lot of stuff because it's sort of tiered, I made it different heights," she said of her backyard.

On a more modest scale, Dolores Muratzki has a variety of pots on her small patio plus a few steps, where she lives in the same senior apartment complex as Bonn. She grows catnip for her three cats in one container and has a large container of mixed herbs for herself. This pot



includes basil, sage, rosemary, chives and parsley.

"Of course, you can't be Italian without growing a few herbs," Muratzki declared. "When you think about cooking, pesto you got to have basil and to cook a chicken you need sage and rosemary. And you can use parsley all the time."

Muratzki also has one large grape tomato plant and as well as flowers such as a rose bush on one pot and a large gardenia in another. She moved to the complex in 2003 and this is her second year of having a container garden.

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Carson Bonn tends to his container plants on his balcony in his apartment in Elmwood Township.



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