

Way to Grow in Orinda

Paint Your Garden with Color

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Although landscaping is often referred to as the “Green Industry,” an all green landscape can be monotonous and boring. Color is often the most prominent factor a homeowner or garden designer will consider when reinventing or sprucing up their landscape.

Good garden design involves knowing how to combine colors and textures so the final product is pleasing to the eye. It takes some practice and experience to develop *an eye for color*, but a good place to start is by studying an artist color wheel.

The colors on an artist’s wheel are arranged by their relationship to each other in progression like the colors in a rainbow starting with violet/red to red, orange/red to orange, yellow/orange to yellow and so on. Most color wheels only contain 12 colors, while in nature there are a seemingly endless numbers of shades and tones of these 12. Still, the color wheel is a good tool to train your eye on choosing and combining the colors you’ll use to paint your garden.

When choosing color combinations for your garden, you will want to select either harmonious or contrasting colors. Harmonious colors are found next to each other on the color wheel and share similar values (i.e. violet and blue or yellow and orange). Contrasting or complimentary colors are opposite each other on the color wheel and share no values or color wavelengths like red is to green or orange is to blue.

Advertising researchers have spent lots of time learning how to use colors to have an impact on people’s moods subliminally. Why not apply this same technique in your garden design to create the feeling or atmosphere you want? Some colors, such as orange and red, called warm colors, make us feel, you guessed it, warmer. While others colors, such as blues and green, can achieve a feeling of coolness. If you plant compatible colors, such as pastels they create a peaceful mood. Monotonous colors (different shades of one or two colors) will create a calming sense, while strong and contrasting colors will induce energy and excitement. Strong colors catch

the eye of the viewer and draw them in. One bright pot of geraniums at your front door will feel welcoming; however, too many bright colors scattered throughout your yard can cause confusion for the eye.

Some gardeners and homeowners have developed certain prejudices about colors. One recent client declared “I hate yellow” so we constantly teased her about all the yellow flowers we were planting in her landscape, while in reality, we did include



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Choosing colorful plants will help you “paint” your garden.

some chartreuse and yellow-leafed plants in her garden. Ironically, these became her favorite plants. When developing your garden’s color palate it’s best to look at all colors as potentially good choices. The grouping of colors is what you need to choose most carefully. A magenta bloom may look fine planted near other flowers that are purple or pink but hideous when combined with blooms of red, orange, or yellow. It’s important to remember that many flowers’ bloom and color are often short lived, while the foliage, bark, and even seed heads may last much longer, adding

an entirely different color and texture interest to your yard throughout the year.

Keep in mind that the color in your garden is not just limited to the plant material. Be sure to consider your hardscape colors (rocks, colored concrete and retaining wall materials) and especially the color of your home. Consider how your plants will blend or contrast with their surroundings. For example, when selecting flowers to plant next to red bricks or a redwood fence, white or yellow flowers would be good choices where as red flowering plants would simply fade into their surroundings. Many gardeners plant their flower beds to accent the exterior color of their home. If your home is tan with green trim, a natural flower bed choice to compliment these colors would be red blossoms.

Dramatic color combinations will give your garden and home a distinctive look.

Recently, we designed a garden for a terra cotta colored house. We planted white dogwoods, purple Iris ‘Ceasars Brother,’ Heuchera (a.k.a. ‘Crème Brule’) and yellow daylilies. These blooms popped against the earth-toned terra cotta walls where something like red poppies or azaleas would have been lost in their background. Shaded areas of the garden can be brightened by using light-colored annuals such as white, light pink, or pale blues. In the shade, dark colors tend to get swallowed up unless they are surrounded by a lighter color to provide them with some contrast.

For more information on garden color and color combinations, try; *The Encyclopedia of Planting Combinations* by Tony Lord, *Shocking Beauty* by Tomas Hobbes, and *The Garden Color Book* by Paul Williams. If you have questions on this topic or for suggestions on future “Way to Grow” articles, please feel free to email us at gardenlights@comcast.net.