



# Color in the Garden

NOTHING AFFECTS us as strongly as color in a garden. It is the first thing we notice when we enter a space. Yellow catches the eye, blue revitalizes, and green soothes. As artist Marc Chagall noted, these sensations are based on the vibration or light frequency of the color. Once you know this, you can use color in a landscape to set a mood. For example, color experts say that houses will sell faster with yellow flower borders in front. Maybe this is because yellow is the happy color and attracts our attention. Similarly, red plants or red features add an energetic punch to any scene. A dash of red brightens up a plant bed or shrub border.

The most restful color is green, in all its many shades and tones. No wonder

Each color has a unique effect in your landscape, so consider which hues of flowers, foliage, and accessories will create the mood you'd like to set.

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHS  
BY JAN JOHNSEN

nature chose to surround us with this nourishing color. The frequency of green is midway on the light spectrum, calming us with its natural balance of cool and warm undertones. Studies have found that a predominantly green setting relaxes our mind. So a garden of green is a therapeutic place to be. Gardentopia, indeed.

Our response to color outdoors is greatly dependent on the quality of available sunlight. The intensity of the sun's rays and the time of year influence our perception of color. For example, in early spring when the light is soft, many people thrill to pastel colors and the thought of bright orange flowers is anathema to them. But as the year progresses, and the sun becomes stronger and higher in the sky, the pastel colors wash

out in the summer light and the golds and oranges are glorious.

The effect of light on color holds true for the varying time of day. In the morning, the sun's rays are gentle and, for this reason, pastel-colored flowers in east- and north-facing beds look wonderful. The bright, bold colors hold their own in south- and west-facing plant beds when the afternoon sun is brightest. It is all about the light.

Color is nature's communication system. It tells insects where the all-important nectar and pollen in flowers is located. It does this through color intensity and patterning. Brightly colored blossoms alert the pollinators that the nectar-laden flower is waiting for them. And patterned blooms, with multicolored petal markings, are similar to bull's-eyes. The

bee, butterfly, or hummingbird follows the color patterning to the desired target. Think about this the next time you see the radial color pattern on a flower—it is actually a signaling system!

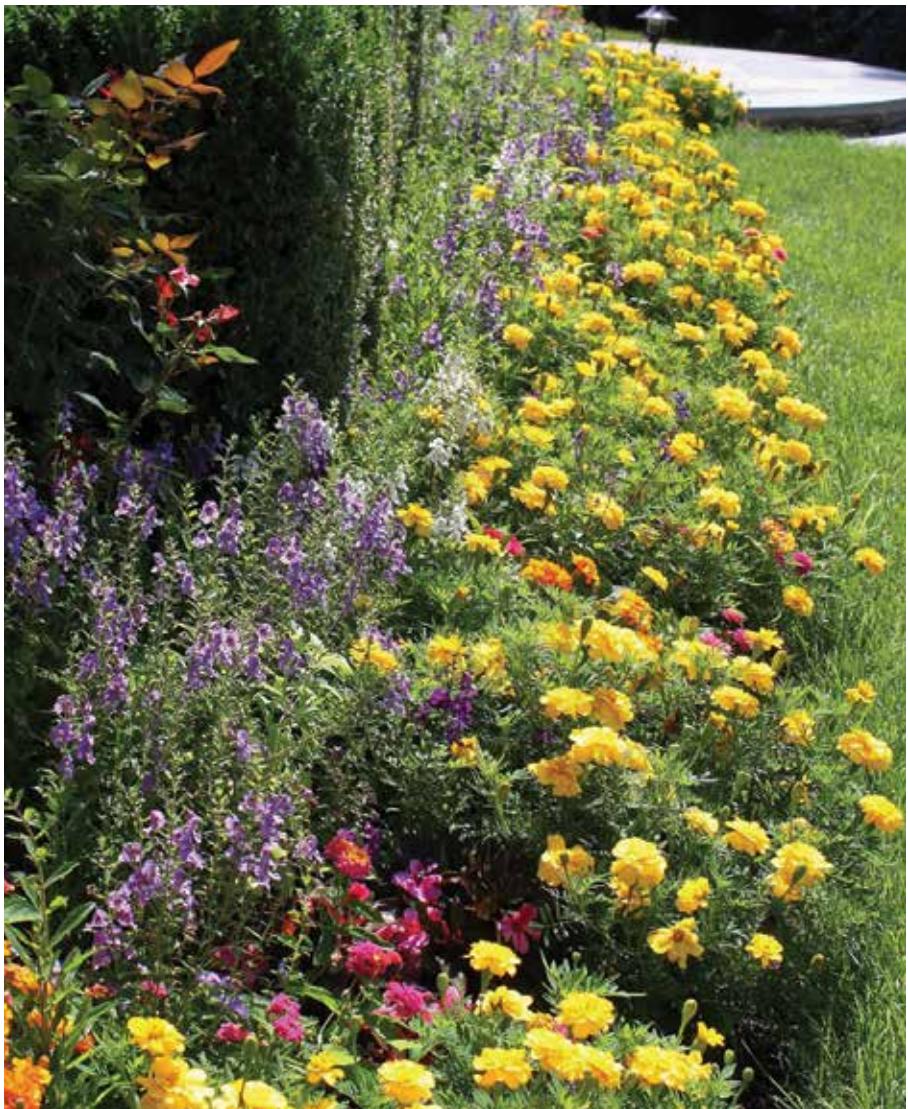
This captivating topic is a lot of fun and, like all discussions about color, subject to personal opinion. I suggest that you be bold and use large expanses of color for the best effect. Plant a mass of yellow roses or blue evergreens. Or mix similar intensity colors together—blend pastels with pastels, bright colors with other bright colors. If you have royal purple iris, mix it with other jewel-toned colors. Or blend dusky dark purples with earth tones such as golden yellow or deep orange. There is so much you can do with color.

The following tips revolve around the use of color outdoors. I hope they encour-

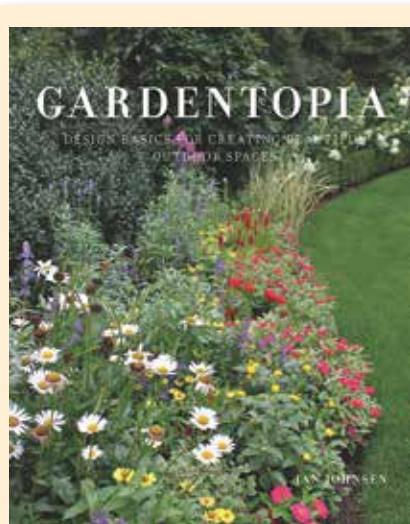
age you to see the colors in your garden with renewed vision. As the great English garden designer Gertrude Jekyll noted, "As for the matter of color, what may be observed is simply without end."

### TRY SOME YELLOW AND CALL ME IN THE MORNING

Feeling down? Surround yourself with yellow in your garden. Yellow is the color of all things joyful and vibrant. This happy color lifts our spirits. And if you want to improve your brain activity, make sure the blossoms are a clear, light yellow, as this color improves our clarity of mind. In the Chinese geomantic tradition of *feng shui*, yellow is thought to enrich the emotions. It is associated with curing a space of sluggish energy. In short, a yellow garden will help keep your spirits and energy high.



'Safari Yellow' French marigolds (*Tagetes patula*) provide a cheery and carefree display.



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To create a cheery garden, plant lots of yellow flowers and foliage in the ground or in pots. There is a multitude of yellow plants to choose from. These include 'Goldfink' tickseed (*Coreopsis grandiflora*), sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*) like dwarf-sized 'Teddy Bear', 'Goldsturm' black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii*), petunia 'Supertunia Citrus', and golden creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea'), among many others.



**Top:** White-flowered plants in masses make a striking statement, such as these 'Deutschland' astilbes that are lighting up a shady bed in spring. **Above:** Bright orange daylilies add excitement in this sunny summer garden, contrasting nicely with cool blue campanulas.

## WHY WHITE?

A predominantly white garden with snowy, opalescent flowers positively glows in the evening. White doublefile viburnums, white tulips, and white deutzias brighten the end of a spring day with an elegant and sublime aura. White flowers and foliage calm us, and they create an uplifting atmosphere. White seems to embrace the form of a flower better than any other color. It shows off the shape pristinely.

We associate white gardens with simplicity and serenity. White cosmos and Shasta daisies (*Leucanthemum ×superbum*) make a cottage garden sing. Pots of snowy white roses or mounded white lantanas make gray mornings seem less gloomy.

Similarly, snowball viburnums clad in white flowers light up dappled borders with their luminous spring show. The variety and type of white flowers you can grow is tremendous. It seems nature can never have too much white.

There are cool whites and warm whites in the plant world. Cool whites are clear and go with silvery foliage such as 'Miss Willmott's Ghost' sea holly (*Eryngium giganteum*), 'Powis Castle' artemisia, and gray-leaved lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*). Creamy whites are complemented by warmer greens such as lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*) and hydrangea.

## IN LOVE WITH ORANGE

Orange is a color that people either really enjoy or intensely dislike. There seems to be no in-between response to this vibrant color. It is a true stimulant—increasing oxygen to the brain, increasing our appetite, and exciting the emotions. In the words of Frank Sinatra, "Orange is the happiest color."

Orange, a bright and flamboyant color, comes into its own in the garden during the height of summer. Bold flowers such as orange daylilies, canna lilies, and marigolds radiate joy under the rays of the hot sun. Of course, this bright show is meant to entice pollinators. The brighter the flower, the more likely it will be visited. Butterflies especially like orange. As the days ripen into the coolness of fall, orange-tinted flowers and leaves exude a warm glow.

There are also the softer shades of orange such as peach, tangerine, and apricot that you can use in your plant beds. These mellow, warm tones blend beautifully

with yellow and blue flowers. Gray-leaved plants such as dusty miller (*Senecio cineraria*), dianthus, and santolina set off orange in a delicious manner. Orange-leaved plants include 'Copper Splendor' Scotch heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Coppertina ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Min-dia'), and 'Orange Dream' Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*).

### A POP OF RED

Bold. Bright. Pow. Red, an eye-catching hue, stands up to the summer sun's withering glare. In a multicolored planting,



warm colors always dominate, and while orange and yellow sing their hearts out, red always steals the show. In fact, if you want to make a distant flowerbed appear closer, include a large dose of red. As fabric designer and colorist Jack Lenor Larsen noted, "Of all the hues, reds have the most potency."

Did you know that bees can't see red? Red flowers are usually pollinated by birds, butterflies, hummingbirds, and the wind. So when you add some red into your garden, not only will you have the benefit of its pizazz, you might also attract red-loving hummingbirds.

There are many bright red flowers that will add pop to your garden. Red geraniums, red roses, and red tulips are traditional standards; but don't forget red cockscombs, red poppies, and red chrysanthemums. And, of course, red bridges,



Red is the bold color that always steals the show. Above: The vibrant flowers of *Gomphrena haageana* 'Strawberry Fields' grab the eye in this colorful garden. Left: *Echinacea purpurea* 'Salsa Red' appears to glow in the bright summer sunlight.

red gates, and red outdoor furniture will always be powerful attention-getters in a landscape. If you want to spice up a garden, add a pop of red!

### PLAYING WITH COLORS

If you cannot play with color in a garden, where can you play? Sometimes we shy away from bright colors or clashing mixes in our everyday life but, outside in a garden, you can be as free and daring as you want.

Who says you can't mix red with magenta or blue with orange? Go ahead, plant that purple 'Profusion' zinnia next to the bright red cockscomb and see what happens. Or contrast the maroon/red foliage of 'Summer Wine' ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) with the clear pink of deciduous azaleas. If you don't like it, you can dig it up and move it. If noth-

ing else, you will spark some lighthearted garden party discussions.

Bright colors are great for drawing attention to areas you want to highlight, like a front entrance. A scintillating color combination that people like is lime green and purple. It sounds terrible, but when used in close proximity, these colors intensify one another. Try Purple Pixie® fringe flower (*Loropetalum chinense* 'Peacock') underlined with the bright chartreuse cascading leaves of 'Margarita' sweet potato vine (*Ipomoea batatas*) or the grassy EverColor 'Everillo' Japanese sedge (*Carex oshimensis*).

Go bold.

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