



# The Right Plant in the Right *place*

PLANTING A GARDEN FOR YEAR-ROUND INTEREST

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**Rudyard Kipling wrote: “Gardens are not made by singing ‘Oh how beautiful’ and sitting in the shade.”**

And anyone who gardens seriously knows exactly what he was talking about. It seems that there is never any rest for those intent on achieving a garden that is harmonious throughout the seasons, with good bones for the winter and a cast of ever-blooming perennials and annuals to add drama and color to lovely summer days. Like children and pets, most

plants require you to pay attention to them, so it helps to determine which plants are worthy of your time and energy before you bring them into your garden “family.”

After many years of moving plants about in my own garden as well as the gardens of my design clients, I have learned to appreciate trees for their structure and have edited my list of favorite flowering plants by whether they fall into the category of what I like to call “well-mannered.” The



gardens I design are small spaces, so every plant needs to pull its weight in the total architecture of the planting scheme.

### Planting Trees for Posterity

The basic structure of a garden begins with trees, but be careful to select trees that will not completely shade your garden within a decade and that provide more than one season of interest, with fruit, flowers, unusual bark, or dramatic fall color. One of my top picks is a dogwood, *Cornus kousa*, for its delicate form and late bloom followed by summer fruit (inedible but pretty) and good fall color. Consider Japanese Stewartia (if you live in zones 7-9) for beautiful bark and small white camellia-like flowers followed by magnificent autumn foliage, or Japanese maples (both the *Acer palmatum* and *dissectum* varieties) for their airy vase-like form and elegant leaves. The Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) is a classic evergreen tree that brings structure to the garden with its shiny green leaves, deep reddish bark, and huge fragrant, pure white flowers that bloom twice a year. 'Little Gem' is perfect for smaller spaces.

### Filling the Borders

There are many things to consider when selecting appropriate plants, including succession of bloom time, different heights, and leaf texture. There are a variety of different greens, from the palest lemon green to dark, glossy green, with new emphasis on chartreuse green

and variegated foliage. I suggest mixing and matching leaf sizes, shapes, and colors for maximum effect in your plantings and working with opposites on the color wheel for eye-pleasing combinations.

Just a few of my favorites by season of bloom start with peonies, iris of every variety, and roses—especially the Jackson & Perkins variety 'Double Delight' or the magnificent climber 'Sally Holmes'. Next, alliums, hemerocallis, lilies, and daisy-like flowers from single and double white shastas to Echinacea, red and yellow gaillardias, rudbeckia, and chrysanthemums for the autumn. Mix in 'Autumn Joy' sedum and white Japanese anemone and you are taken through the whole gardening season. Add spires like deep blue delphiniums, Lupines, and even spiky yuccas, if you live in zone 4. Don't forget phormiums (zones 8-10) and especially look for the 'Maori Queen'. When sunlight shines through the plant, it glows a rosy amber—gorgeous!

### Gaining Height and Structure

One of my favorite plants for architectural height and drama is the splendid *Cimicifuga* 'Pritchard's Giant', which adds fabulous late season bloom with fluffy white flowers on long dark stems—terrific in the back of a border. If you have shade, add *Fatsia japonica*, and if you have a lot of space and perhaps a pond, plant the magnificent *Gunnera manicata*. Its common name is 'Dinosaur Food' and you'll understand why when you plant one. If it's happy in your garden, there's no stopping it.

One of the most valuable plants for a shady garden is the hydrangea. There are many varieties from which to choose, but oak-leaved and lace caps are two of my favorites. For smaller beds, choose 'Preziosa'—it will stay more compact and has three full seasons of color. Also look for newer varieties, which bloom on new wood and can be easily pruned each year.

### Something Soft and Fluffy

Smaller flowers that add a final dimension to your garden include salvias, phlox, astilbes, verbena (especially the vibrant 'Homestead Purple'), and silver Artemisia 'Powis Castle'. If you live where lavender does well, it looks beautiful frothing into the pathway at the front of the border. If your climate is too wet or cold, nepeta is a good substitute.

### Annual Additions

Welcoming your perennials back each season is like a visit with old friends, but every garden needs some annual help to keep things really interesting when flowers begin to fade or are between bloom cycles. Each year, there seem to be more and more annuals to choose from, and the color and dramatic bloom they bring for an entire season cannot be duplicated. I tend to favor vibrant colors like orange, hot pink, and chartreuse, offset by pure white. If your garden is sunny, plant cosmos. If it is shady, plant impatiens—either the bedding kind or New Guinea, which require a bit more shade and water. Look for coleus—the varieties are endless and provide a gorgeous counterpoint for impatiens in shady gardens. Giant 'Kong' is hot pink and chartreuse; another beauty is 'Inky Fingers'. Each provides great texture and interest in pots or beds.

### Some Handy Tips

Before you plant, it's a good idea to have your soil analyzed by your local horticultural extension service so you know what it's lacking. Then, amend it now for great results later on. Plant several of each flower you select—three, five, or seven is a good number. Have a color scheme in mind: Consider making a garden of only green and white or blue and yellow for a fun challenge. Take it slowly. It takes at least two years before your garden will start to fill in. So be patient and enjoy the process. ■