



Color in the Garden—Focused, Dedicated and Simple

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“Writing and gardening, these two ways of rendering the world in rows, have a great deal in common. In my part of the country, there comes each year one long and occasionally fruitful season when gardening takes place strictly on paper and in the imagination.” Michael Pollan

Even an icy, windy day can’t stop the most determined gardener. February finds them working on compost piles, filling birdfeeders, thumbing through plant catalogs and envisioning the summer’s perfect garden.

The desire for color may be the single most important element sought by gardeners, according to Bryan Kinghorn of Kinghorn Gardens in Omaha. But that doesn’t mean color has to be unusual or dramatic. “One of the most distinct colors in all of nature is green,” said Kinghorn, and it has an amazing range—from subtle to crisp green, lime to gray to olive to granny smith apple green.

Kinghorn recommends using a subtle mix of greens with limited and deliberate placement of flower color. Using green as the primary color more closely mimics the natural environment and provides the perfect backdrop for more dramatic colors.

“Color is exciting to work with and, in the end, has tremendous impact on the overall personality of the garden,” Kinghorn said.

He encourages gardeners to select dedicated areas where it can have the most impact—strategically placing it to move guests through gates, onto patios or toward other entertainment areas. Color can be used to lead the eye in the same way, making it especially valuable in areas visible from inside the home. “I like to use color very intentionally, as a focus, a tool for visual continuity and as an invitation toward a mysterious destination.”

Repetition and diversity, two components of good design, can be easily and effectively achieved through the strategic use of color. Since color is one way to leave a very personal fingerprint in your yard, Kinghorn recommends selecting a favorite color and using plants with different hues of that same color. The foliage color of one plant can be repeated in the flower colors of another, for example. Selecting flowers with the same color but in different textures can provide the same appealing mix of repetition and diversity—planting delicate, dark pink coralbells alongside bold coneflowers, for instance. “It’s a wonderful practice that is easily overlooked,” Kinghorn said, “but when done well is simply stunning.”

Other considerations for designing with color:

- Annuals tend to be brighter-colored and longer-blooming, but they require annual planting and leave the landscape bare for much of the year.
- Color has a significant impact on visual space. Muted or pastel colors, placed farther out in the landscape, visually expand the garden space and give the illusion of being farther away.
- Red, orange and yellow flowers appear closer than they are and are particularly effective in full sun.
- Placing light-colored plants in shady areas will brighten the space and make it more visually interesting; dark-colored plants will appear even darker and less noticeable.
- Color complements other design considerations, including unity, focal points, rhythm and balance. Though visually important, it is seasonal and transitory in nature and one of the later considerations in landscape design.