



Seasons of Color

by Cynthia Egger

I have never met a prospective client who has said, "I want just a plain, boring, drab yard." Of course, you want color in your yard. You want to see something interesting every time you look out the back window or drive up to your house. Hence comes my saying, "The plantings will be moderate maintenance, low water, deer resistant, and provide color and interest throughout the year." And you don't have to be a slave to your garden.

It's not difficult to create color and interest in your landscape, especially if you hire a professional. But if you prefer not to hire a professional, there are ways for you to create your own garden that looks great year round.

First of all, you need to have a backdrop to the picture you are creating—if you don't already have one. A backdrop can be the side of the house, a fence, a hedge, or a mass of plantings—something that blends and doesn't draw a lot of attention to itself.

If you have to create a backdrop and you have 2-6 feet in width, you can plant a formal or manicured hedge such as Privet (*Ligustrum Texanum* or *Lucidum*) grown for its clean green look; Escallonia, noticeable by its pink flower in the summer; *Euonymus "Silver King,"* characterized by green leaves with a silvery-white edge; *Ilex (Holly),* featuring red berries in the winter; or one of my favorites, *Syzygium paniculata "Monterey Bay,"* sporting glossy dark green leaves with a blush of cherry red. Check with your local nursery to find out which would be best for your location.

If you don't have much depth to your planting bed, planting a vine on a trellis or attaching it to the fence not only gives you a backdrop, but it can also provide a mass of color and/or fragrance for a couple of months. Make certain it's non-invasive to avoid damage to your house or fence. Some good choices are *Trachelospermum jasminoides* (star jasmine) with white fragrant flowers in the mid-summer; *Clytostoma callistegioides* (lavender trumpet vine), which reveal lavender flowers in late spring/early summer; and if you don't mind the vines losing their leaves for 3 months in the winter, a wonderful combination is *Rosa Cecile Brunner* with baby pink roses and *Clematis Jackmanii* with large rich purple flowers blooming in spring. Another great backdrop is espaliered (trained to a trellis) *Sasanqua Camellia*, which blooms in winter. My favorite is *Apple Blossom* with its perfusion of white flowers with a rose pink edge.

After establishing a backdrop, the next step is to add your trees and one-of-a-kind focal points. When placing a focal point, approach it from all angles. A great focal plant is an *Acer palmatum "Sangokaku,"* often called the coral bark maple. It has green leaves in the spring and summer, yellow fall foliage, and in the winter, blood red bark creating a garden sculpture. *Acer palmatum "Butterfly,"* which has green leaves edged with a white border

and the most incredible crimson fall foliage, achieves a height of 7 feet. Or combine Blue Atlas Cedar with the Thundercloud flowering Plum, its dark purple leaves and true pink flowers are striking against the gray/blue needles. The flowering pink cherry, Prunus Akebono is magnificent with a mass of dark blue Ceanothus Dark Star or Julia Phelps.

Many objects other than plants can add interest to your garden, such as boulders, a water feature, a bird bath, a garden sculpture, or a piece of drift wood.

Once the backdrop and the focal point are chosen, you're ready to fill in with plantings that provide color year round. Always plant in groupings and repeat the combination of the groupings so the progression of color and interest continues throughout the yard.

The following are some great, easy-maintenance combinations of plants that provide color year round:

Pink Iceberg roses; Plumbago Capensis "Royal Cape" (blue flowers); Choisya ternata (white flowers with fragrance); Lavendula "Provence" (fragrant lavender); Convolvus cneorum (silver foliage with white flowers); Lavender Lantana (green foliage with lavender flowers).

Here are combinations that provide a clean but not-so-formal look: Ceanothus (deep blue flowers), Forsythia intermedia (yellow flowers); Choisya ternata (white fragrant flowers); Myrtus communis compacta (compact dark green leaves with white puff flowers); Loropetalum chinense "Razzleberri" (purple/pink foliage with pink flowers); Helichrysum petilore "Variegatum" with gray wooly foliage; Cuphea hyssifolia (green leaves with tiny purple flowers).

For the shade, the greatest combination back to front is Rhododendron and Camellia (Mixed colors in winter/spring); Hydrangea (mixed colors summer/fall); Azalea (mixed colors winter/spring); Daphne odora (extremely fragrant winter bloomer); Pieris japonica "variegata" (white bell flowers and crimson foliage in spring); fern; fuchsia (flowers summer/fall/winter); Sarcococca rusifolia (fragrant in summer and red berries in winter); Clivia miniata (orange flowers in summer); Campanula portenschlagiana (blue flowered ground cover); Hosta for their interesting foliage and texture; lamium maculatum (silver foliage and pink flowers summer/fall)

It really is possible to have color and interest in your yard all year round. All you need is the right combination of plantings. :::