



hue and YOU in the garden

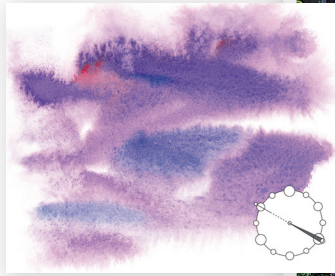
The second part of our two-part series on color in the garden focuses on creating a palette through color schemes. Here, internationally recognized author and designer Tracy DiSabato-Aust explains basic schemes and how to implement them in your garden.

Text and photos by Tracy DiSabato-Aust Illustrations by Stacey Renee Peters

Combining colors for the home or wardrobe is often easier than choosing colors for the garden, as a plant's color changes throughout its life, from emergence, budding and flowering to seasonal decline. If you factor in the inescapable context of green, and constantly changing light and weather conditions that also affect color, where do you begin?

I get ideas by visiting gardens and noting colors that move me. I also review garden photos and sketch colors that were used in an appealing combination or vignette (see photo below). A garden's style, size and situation may dictate color choices, or when certain colors will predominate. Even the color itself may dictate where and how it's used. You can always vary a garden's color scheme in different seasons, too. For example, you could focus on soothing blues in spring, exploding yellows in summer and muted oranges in autumn. Or you could include a variety of colors for spring, and limit the summer palette to fewer colors. Above all, go with colors you like.

Since garden colors can be combined in innumerable ways, choosing a color scheme is a helpful starting point. Schemes can be monochromatic, analogous (harmonious), complementary (contrasting), or polychromatic, to name just a few. Let's review the features of each.



Monochromatic color scheme.



One with the Garden: THE MONOCHROMATIC PALETTE

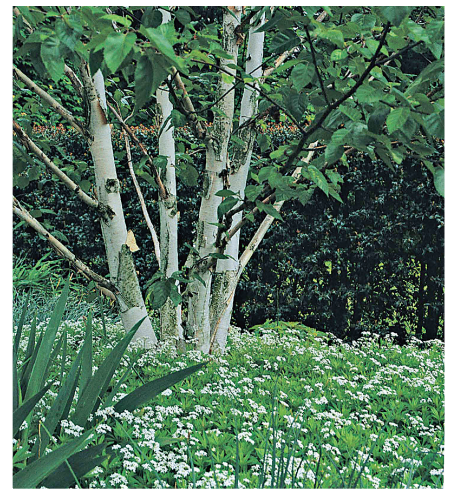
Monochromatic color schemes incorporate shades, tints and tones of a single pure hue, such as violet (see illustration above). This simplifies the design process by reducing the number of variables (see top-right photo).

A monochromatic palette focuses more attention on details and subtleties, by emphasizing the structure and rhythm of planting beds. Each plant's form and textures are more easily appreciated, and their cohesive color often conveys sophistication (see middle-right photo). Additionally, a monochromatic scheme is less distracting to the eye, since it doesn't have to constantly refocus on ever-changing color, and shifts in light can heighten its elegance.

This color approach can be accomplished in several ways. You could focus predominantly on tints of a color and use shades of the color for accents, or you could start with tints of the color and build to shades of the color as you move down the bed, and then progress back to tints. You may decide that mostly shades, with tints in moderation, would work best in your setting. Or you could tie two or more monochromatic color choices together through the use of analogous colors.

Varying shades of green also make excellent transitional colors, since green is present in nearly every plant. Of course, a monochromatic scheme could itself be green, but most monochromatic gardens are not truly, totally, the chosen color alone, as they always include green (see bottom-right photo).

Developing this palette can take you to a new level of design and pleasure in your garden. I've discovered both solace and excitement in exploring the subtle beauty of a single color's varying tints, tones and shades.



Top: The cohesive monochromatic unity among the flowering plants and grayish-green foliage is thoughtfully orchestrated into the scene, with the gray trellis, fencing and pavers. Middle: A monochromatic combination allows the simple beauty of forms and textures to shine.

Bottom: Sophistication is the message of this monochromatic vignette. Notice how green will always be a part of any garden color scheme.



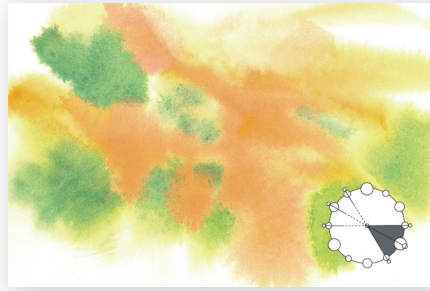
There's no better way to really "see" plants and colors than to try to draw and paint them—even if you're not a Picasso. Also, it will probably be one of the few times you actually sit down in your garden.

Harmonious Path: THE ANALOGOUS PALETTE

Analogous, or harmonious, color schemes use predominantly two or three adjacent colors on the color wheel, such as red, orange and yellow (see color wheel illustration on opposite page). You can choose any color on the wheel and go forward or backward, as the eye does not need to refocus when related colors are used.

In the strictest sense of the word, harmonious schemes are created when colors are related by a shared hue. For example, orange, yellow and yellowish green are truly harmonious as they all share yellow as a parent color (see illustration at right). Likewise, blue-green, blue-violet and violet have blue as a common parent color (see photo at left).

In keeping with our previous discussion on color theory (see “Hue and You” in the spring 2007 issue of *Boulder County Home & Garden Magazine*), the best combinations will be with lighter light colors and darker dark colors; for example, with violet and red, tint the red to pink, which blends nicely with any shade of vio-



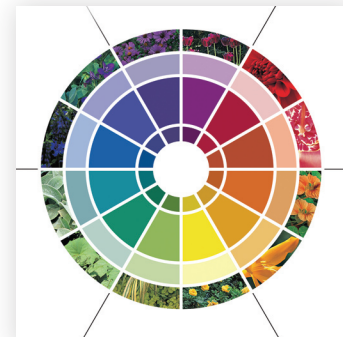
Analogous color scheme.

let, rather than lightening the violet to pale lavender, which doesn't work as well with purer reds. Rarely do we combine pure hues of colors. Remember, too, that we can decrease a color's brightness by surrounding it with analogous colors, which results in a gentler transition between contrasts.

Some of my favorite garden designers use harmonious schemes in their gardens. Color combinations, such as pinks, maroons and purples, or grays, blues and purples, are stunning. Warmer combinations of gold, yellow and green also work beautifully. With color, extreme unity can be boring, while extreme complexity can be overstimulating. True harmony is a dynamic equilibrium between the two.

and purple foliage are a wonderful contrast, but shouldn't be overdone; black, purple and gold are also good in moderation.

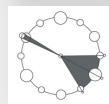
A split complementary scheme combines analogous and complementary colors. This scheme is created using any three adjacent colors on the color wheel, along with the middle hue's complement. For example, blue-violet, violet, red-violet and violet's complement, yellow (see black-and-white illustration above). Another approach is to use only three colors—a single color and the two colors on either side of its complement; for example, green (whose complement is red), red-violet and red-orange (see illustration below).



This 12-part color wheel differentiates colors into shades (inner ring), pure hues (middle ring) and tints (outer ring).



Related analogous colors of blue-green, blue and violet create harmony in this combination.



*Above: Complementary color scheme.
Left: Split complementary.*

Complementary Course: THE CONTRASTING PALETTE

Complementary, or contrasting, schemes focus on two colors opposite one another on the color wheel, such as blue and orange (see color illustration above). This approach requires skill, as too much contrast forces the eye to constantly refocus, creating confusion. Thus, a gardener must choose just the right shades, tints and tones of colors to avoid intense contrasts that are too jarring.

Some of the best combinations feature plants that have one element in common and one in contrast, be it color, texture or form. Playing with subtle foliage color differences is effective for this scheme. Yellow

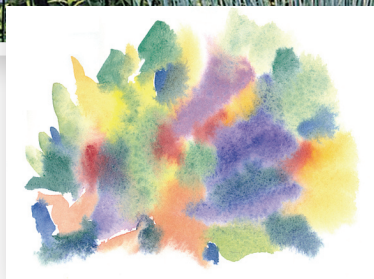
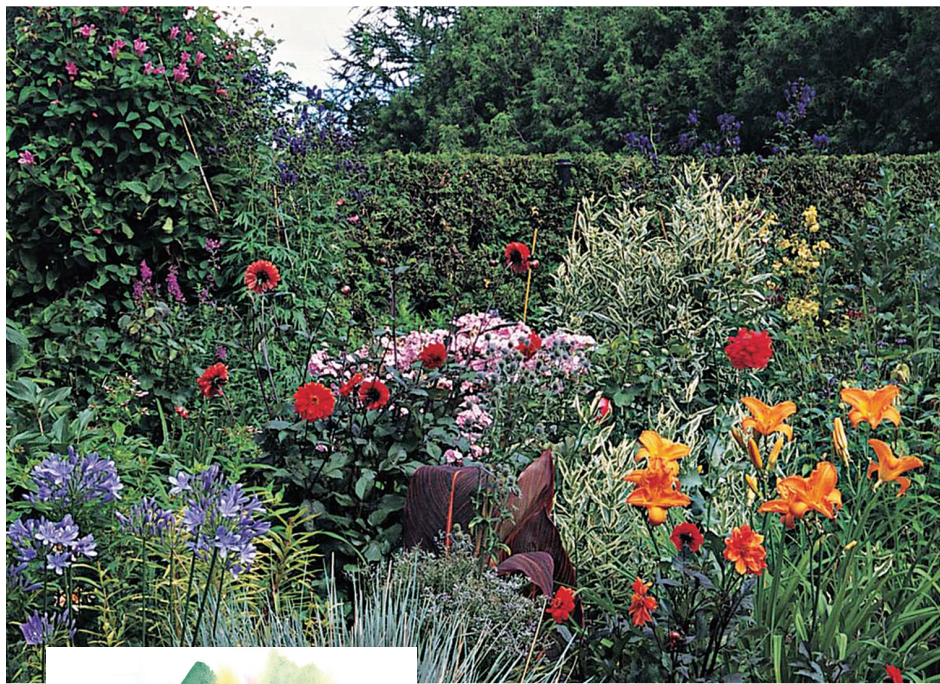
A Lot of a Little: THE POLYCHROMATIC PALETTE

A polychromatic scheme includes a little of every color (see illustration at right). People with limited space who love lots of colors often prefer this scheme. This riot of color can be disciplined—or not. However, the principles we've discussed—combining different values, the use of repetition and contrast, focal points and so on—must be considered for optimal effect (see photo at right).

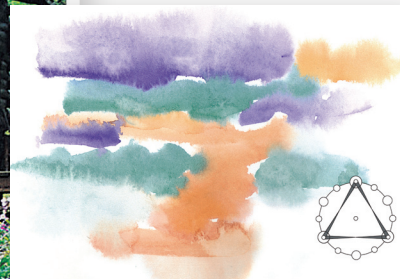
The approaches to this scheme are endless, but one effective way to combine many colors is to place them so that a viewer moves through them without abrupt transitions—from restful blues, greens and grays, to cool creams and whites, into paler colors of yellows and pinks, into stronger colors of yellows, oranges and reds, then back through the softer colors, ending in purples and lilacs.

You can also throw fluidity to the wind and go crazy with a bit of everything here and there. Your garden should reflect your style, so do what makes you happy.

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY TIMBER PRESS; FLOWER PHOTOS BY IAN ADAMS



Left: Polychromatic color scheme.
 Above: This garden incorporates a polychromatic color theme with style. The strong formal structure and horizontal line of the background hedge adds needed control.



Triadic color scheme.

Triple Treat: THE TRIADIC PALETTE

Triadic harmony is another color approach (see illustration above) that's created with three colors equidistant from each other on the color wheel. For example, red, yellow and blue (but be careful to avoid a preschool look with this combination), or green, violet and orange (see color wheel illustration on page 101). This approach gives you more color than some other schemes, yet the colors are still compatible.

Another approach is to use a personalized, limited color palette of two or three colors you like, perhaps pinks and whites or apricots and plums (see photo at left).

This garden uses fairly saturated purple and blue flowers for the predominant colors, with unsaturated yellow flowers in spring to complete the triadic theme.

Parting Thoughts

Even though great color combinations can happen by chance in the garden, a color scheme is usually essential to inspired results. Start by making a list of all the plants that fit into your chosen scheme, including ones with colored foliage, and what colors you might want to use for accents. For each plant, consider the color of all its aspects—flowers, foliage, fruit, bark and autumn color.

Also, think about the balance and proper proportion of hues, values and intensities; harmonious color schemes; the use of contrasting colors to create focal points; the effect of contrasting or constant values and saturations; and the repetition of colors, values and saturations that unify and direct the eye through the garden.

Painting a garden in plants is a purposeful project with many rewards and joys. Remember, all plants can be moved, so be brave in your color selections and enjoy the journey!

Tracy DiSabato-Aust is an award-winning garden designer and owner of Horticultural Classics and Consultations, a garden design, installation and maintenance company. She is an internationally recognized horticulture author whose books include The Well-Tended Perennial Garden and The Well-Designed Mixed Garden (Timber Press, www.timberpress.com), from which this piece was adapted.



PHOTO BY DEBRA GOUGH