



Perennial Flower Garden Design

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Flower garden design can be considered from two perspectives-- the design qualities of the perennials, and the design principles which utilize the design qualities of the individual plants.

Design Qualities of Plants

I. Size

1. most dominant feature, one chosen for first when selecting plants
2. consider scale to landscape, proportion in placing to other plants and elements
3. balance original plant size with growth rate and mature height desired
example: low, small foamflowers in front of taller, larger hostas

II. Form and Line

1. next most dominant plant quality, pick plants for next
2. includes upright or spreading, mounded, rounded, vase-shaped, columnar
3. especially important for perennials with flowers only 3 weeks average
4. line is whether plant is more vertical (strong element) or horizontal (pleasing, soothing, less jarring), rounded or mounded is between
example: upright yuccas against a low stone wall

III. Texture

1. consider overall and individual leaf textures
2. fine from finely cut leaves, small leaves, light colored leaves, open habit of growth; less visually strong element, tends to "recede" adding effect of distance; emphasize color and form
3. coarse from large leaves, bright colored leaves, dense habit; strong visual element, tends to "advance"; can use for accent or emphasis; tend to overpower color and form; tropical effect
4. also important with perennials as usually this is seen not flower color
example: fine texture of small baby's breath flowers interplanted among asiatic lilies with coarse texture from larger leaves, flowers and brighter colors

IV. Color

1. of leaves and flowers
2. creates moods: warm colors (red, orange, yellow) are more exciting and dominant than cool colors (blue, green, purple) which are more calm, soothing
3. changes as flowers (even leaves) come, age and pass
4. primary: red, yellow, blue; secondary: orange, green, purple; combine 2 primary to get secondary eg red and yellow give orange
5. combine adjacent colors on color wheel for less dramatic effect, unity (eg green and purple)-- analagous color scheme
6. combine colors separated by another (eg red and yellow, orange and purple--opposite on color wheel) for more dramatic effect and contrast-- use sparingly to avoid "busy" effect--complementary color scheme

7. for primary or secondary colors, "value" or light reflected determines shade if blackish or tint if whitish, eg for blue, navy is shade and baby blue is tint; using one color with shades and tints is monochromatic color scheme
8. each combination of plants represents one color scheme; whole garden can be one scheme for more dramatic effect

Principles of Design

1. interrelated
2. each uses most design characteristics of plants
3. used properly they create "unity"--pleasing, harmonious relationship of elements

I. Scale and Proportion

1. scale--overall size relationships between landscape and plants, eg. rock garden is often small scale
2. proportion--relative size relationships among plants and elements , eg. size of perennials in relation to adjacent bench

II. Variety

1. simplicity--using few plant types--makes easier to perceive (cleaner) and more dramatic design; drifts or massing few or one plant type in large area, eg. primroses in damp area
2. need repetition to avoid excessive variety, effect of "zoo"; can use many different plants if some common design "threads" such as color, eg. white garden at Sissinghurst
3. adds interest

III. Repetition or Sequence

1. repeating a plant or characteristic (eg color, form) towards unity
2. visually leads eye through a bed or landscape
3. need some variety or emphasis to avoid monotony
4. creates a "rhythm"

example: repeating a color pattern in a border such as pink, blue, white; interspersing a dominant color such as yellow sparingly throughout a border or bed

IV. Balance

1. formal--symmetry, if garden divided along an axis, one side is mirror image or similar to other side, plants used in even numbers in a pattern
2. informal--asymmetrical, more common, plants used in odd numbers often not in a regular pattern; natural garden is a variation-- looks like nature and not made
3. refers to visual strength or attractiveness of elements, parts of a garden, plants; eg bright color in one area might be balanced with similar color, or less bright but more color in other areas

V. Emphasis

1. drawing attention to certain area such as from a bold color (as red bee balm) or bold texture (as in the large-leaved Gunnera)
2. use for variety, draw attention to an area such as a nice view or away from a bad view
3. provides a focus for the eye, a place for eye to rest when viewing a landscape or bed-- a focal point
4. can use to "accent" an area or add interest; lawn furniture or sculpture can be used
5. often limit to 5-10% of overall plan or effect of emphasis lost
6. can contrast opposing colors for dramatic effect; limited contrasts and repeat for best effect