

# Flower Color Influences Garden Mood

## National Garden Bureau

Everyone likes a bright, colorful garden, but did you know that you can use the colors of flowers and plants to create a mood, shorten or lengthen the look of a garden, or really call attention to a special feature? It's possible because of the way we perceive colors.

### Hey Look Me Over!

Red and yellow are two colors that immediately capture our attention. Scientists tell us that we actually see these two colors faster than others! Our eyes are drawn to displays of red or yellow, so they are excellent choices to put around a fountain, or to plant in a key area that you want people to see. Likewise, if you have something in your garden you DON'T want people to look at, plant bright yellow flowers opposite that area to draw attention away from there. Ideally, they will look at the yellow flowers and turn their backs on whatever eyesore it is you want to hide.

If you have some steps leading to your garden or in your garden, consider planting a border of yellow flowers next to them. The yellow will catch people's eyes and alert them in an attractive way that there are steps there and they should be careful.

One color expert has said that a house will even sell faster if it has yellow trim or has borders of yellow flowers out front. This advice isn't guaranteed, but if you are trying to sell your house quickly, this is certainly worth a try. Is your garden area long and narrow and would you like to "square it off" a little with minimal effort? Plant lots of bright red flowers at the far end and this will visually "pull" that end in closer and it won't seem so long and narrow. This can be done with anything you want to "bring closer," because red "advances" visually.

Red also physically arouses us and gets our adrenaline pumping. If you want to excite people, put lots of red around. Experiments have shown that food tastes better around red, so red flowers around

your outdoor eating area will stimulate conversation and make the food taste better, too.

Masses of red or yellow are guaranteed attention-getters and will not go unnoticed. In a full-sun garden consider the red blooms of petunias, celosia or wax begonias. Yellow is most often found in marigolds, but for taller plants with golden yellow blooms try sunflowers.

And, by the way, men tend to favor yellow-based reds (like scarlet) while women tend to favor blue-based reds (like burgundy). If you and your spouse don't agree on what "red" to plant, this could be why.

### How Sweet It Is

The color pink is perceived as being sweet tasting and fragrant. You may not have noticed it, but people will usually try to smell pink flowers even when they don't have any fragrance. And pink is a soothing, calming color as well. One researcher has said that people are less likely to argue with someone who is wearing a lot of pink, so lots of pink plants around your outdoor patio could contribute to amiable conversation when you entertain.

In sunny locations consider pink blooms from dianthus, geraniums or tall cosmos. In shade, pink wax begonias or impatiens will brighten the area.

### Crisp and Clean

If you are the type of person who likes things neat, tidy and precise, white is the color for you. We think of doctors in their white coats and laboratories with white walls and equipment because we associate white with cleanliness, orderliness and precision. Crisp flower beds or border plantings of white will give your garden a well-planned and orderly look. But don't expect the color alone to do all the work — you will still need to tend your garden. Masses of white can be hard on the eyes, so you may want to include areas of other colors as well.

White is also the last color to fade from sight as darkness falls, so it's a good choice for areas you

want to look at in the evening, and also a good choice for bordering pathways since you can follow your way easier even as it gets dark.

Garden annuals that deliver good white blooms are nicotianas, vincas and zinnias. These three will perform best in sunny locations.

Green is an excellent complement to white because it actually helps your eyes recover quickly from strain. (Old-time engravers, who had to do very detailed work, often kept a green gemstone nearby so that they could look at it to relieve their eye strain — honest!) Mid-tone to deep greens can impart an air of richness and luxury to a garden, while lighter and yellow-green greens give a more casual look. You might want to consider this if you are planting up some areas with lots of plants you've chosen more for their foliage than their flowers.

### Keeping Your Cool

Have you ever wondered why swimming pools are usually painted "swimming pool blue?" It's because we perceive blue as being cool and calming.

If swimming pools were painted red, we'd think the water was hot.

When our field of vision is filled with blue, our bodies actually slow down and we begin to get calmer. You can use this attribute of blue to create a feeling of coolness even in full-sun garden by planting lots of blue flowers (lighter blues are better than dark blues). Even if it's 95 degrees, you'll feel cooler in the "blue" area of your garden.

And blue tones can help you widen or lengthen the look of a garden because blue recedes, or falls back, from our sight. Lots of blue flowers and blue-toned foliage planted on the long sides of a long and narrow garden will actually seem to make it wider because the blue "falls back" visually.

Blues are the first colors to fade from sight as dusk falls, so you

may want to choose a brighter color if there is an area in your garden that you like to look at in the evening.

Cool blue tones are borne on salvia, eustoma (lisianthus), morning glory and ageratum plants.

### Creative Gray

There aren't a lot of plants that come in gray, but Dusty Miller (cineraria) and a few other foliage plants do come in silvery grey tones. What's interesting about gray is that it is the only color that doesn't produce an after-image. Usually, if you stare at a color for awhile and then close your eyes or look away, you will "see" its complementary color in your mind's eye. This doesn't happen with gray. Gray is said to promote creativity (you'll often find gray walls in an advertising agency), so if you often go into your garden to think, consider planting a bed of gray to look at.

## Let The Good Times Roll

What if you like lots of different colors mixed in among each other? That's great.

Mixes of bright colors give a happy, festive look to an area. Mix different flowers, different colors and different textures to your heart's delight, but just be careful not to overdo it. Too much mixing can look more disorganized than festive, so using three or four colors over and over can help tie the look together.

For a wide range of colors, try mixtures of zinnias, petunias or portulacas. For a more limited but still festive look, a marigold mixture can display the four colors of yellow, orange, gold and maroon.

If you haven't thought about the psychological effects of color before, these tips may give you a starting point for creating not only the look you want in your garden, but also the "feel" you want as well.

## Summary

Using color effectively can help you change the look of your garden, create a cool, restful area, and even help you be more creative.

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