

THE ARTIST IN YOU: Colour Scheming All The Way to Autumn

By Edythe Falconer

After an eye-popping spring enriched with crocuses, daffodils, brilliantly-coloured tulips and tall bearded irises, and after a luscious summer bedecked with poppies, peonies and lovely roses, the colours of August, September and October can be somewhat sombre. However with careful planning you can bring in the final act of the growing season with brilliant panache.

One way to ensure three-season colour is to create garden maps – one each for spring, summer and fall. Working with transparencies, you can lay one plan over another so that you can see when some plants are quiet and others are enthusiastically flowering. Hang on to these maps and you can adjust them annually. Each year you and your garden evolve. Garden design is art in motion



Winter is a good time to cruise the internet, peruse gardening books and catalogues, and attend garden seminars. The garden artist in you will benefit from trips to local art galleries where you can view works that capture the feeling and mood of swathes of beautiful plants. Ask yourself how you can paint with flowers to create similar effects.

Come spring it's time to visit garden centres in your area. Strolling through your neighbourhood and carefully inspecting front yard gardens, you'll find blocks and blocks of ideas –good, bad and beautiful. Numerous garden tours are available so that you can view the works of other garden artists.

While you're at it you can inspect neighbourhood hardscape – architecture, attached smaller buildings, stone walks, etc. What you do with your space needs to harmonize with your own buildings and fences, and also with the neighbouring structures and spaces adjacent to yours. Harmonizing doesn't require you to imitate or copy.

Late summer and the cooler days that follow are often the most colour-challenged times of the year. Our magnificent deciduous trees do a noble job of mitigating this problem. Having provided a stately backdrop for most of the summer, in fall they display the flamboyant side of their personality by bursting with hot hues for their final fling.

Evergreens, a year round pleasure, “harmonize” with everything. Their many shapes, sizes and textures provide quiet balance for the parade of colour throughout the growing season. In winter they have star billing against the stark white beauty of snow.

We often associate fall with vibrant hot colours. However, gentler hues also work well. White can be combined with anything or even itself. Combine whites and vary the texture and form of the plants to get a very dramatic effect – especially on a moonlit night. One of my favourites is garlic chives, an ornamental edible, with beautiful clusters of tiny star-shaped pure-white flowers.

Phlox and Japanese anemone are both reliable, beautiful plants. Since Japanese anemone is sometimes a little too reliable it's a good idea to locate it where it can "naturalize". A generous stand of phlox in colours ranging from white to brilliant red is a sight to behold.

Native plants can be a joy too. Enter vervain with pyramidal blue clusters reaching over a metre in height. This impressive native plant moves easily between wild and cultivated, readily self-seeds and is easily transplanted when young.

When it comes to warm or even hot colours, cannas are easy to love. In our climate cannas are annuals - or tender perennials whose tubers can be overwintered indoors. You'll always have plenty to share with friends and strangers alike since canna tubers are the zucchinis of the underworld. A dense and lofty stand of golden cup plants together with the rich intense colours of hybrid sunflowers can be super-hot statements for your garden.

For the royal palette there is purple. Many excellent shrubs cloak themselves in rich purples and burgundies throughout the growing season. Or grow a very special vegetable - purple-pole bean – a terrific climber on trellis or fence.

Grasses are now readily available on the market. Colours are subtle and textures are intricate. Some spread and some clump. It's important to know which is which before you decide where to plant them.

A little bit of red goes a long way. This is especially true for the scarlet runner bean, a legume that can twine and climb for many metres. The foliage looks great on fences or trellises, its small red flowers attract butterflies and hummingbirds, the beans can be eaten fresh or dried. Foliage, flowers, wildlife, edible beans, legume – this vine is the ultimate multi-purpose plant.

Vines, including the laudable scarlet runner bean, can divide your garden space into garden "rooms", block unattractive views and provide shady spots in the garden. Vine tents are great play areas for children of all ages.

Features such as statuary, paths, rocks, found objects, fountains, ponds, trellises and antique chairs are companions for plantscape. They provide year-round interest and most can be moved around according to need and whim.

Here you are, producer and director on your very own set. You've chosen the cast. You've nurtured the performances of all your players and now everyone is ready for the

final act of a summer long performance. Your Academy Award is an Oscar-shaped vase full of autumn colour to bring inside as the curtain falls and you relax in anticipation of the long rest indoors.