

8 Months of Color... Year of Color!

Plants in glorious sequence plus practicality of design, planting and care

Introducing design for specific bloom sequence.

Month by month of color. So much to love, even more to consider:

Hue. We see and react to tiny detail.

Bloom time. Not generalities but peak times, week by week.

Overall design.

Soil condition and planting techniques and smart maintenance.

March

Sigh of relief as the color "returns." Truly, it's *change* that returns!

Excellent opportunity to learn and improve.

Plant in color spots that are realistic in size. Must have impact for *your* viewer.

In balance with other main features: shrubs, winter-aspect grasses, etc.

Close at hand, 50 square feet may be fine for a bed.

More often, 200 square feet is a minimum.

Place the color at focal points.

Be aware of background and evergreen elements on the stage.

Telltale: Persistent foliage of barberry; hybrid vernal witchhazel; sugar maple; Lenten rose (*Helleborus* hybrid); Allen Centennial garden; snow *Crocus* (*C. minimus*); (*Forsythia*); Cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*); vernal witchhazel with winter hazel and Cornelian cherry; hybrid witchhazel (*H. x mollis* 'Jelena'); violets; 'Amber Waves' *Heuchera*; myrtle *Euphorbia* (*E. myrsinites*); 'Blue Star' juniper; *Miscanthus*; winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)

April

Jewel of a month: Beautiful, saturated colors.

Don't wait to begin the year's gardening "later." The time is now.

Critical factors:

Plant selection.

Right plant, right place. A species must thrive not simply survive.

Don't guess about sequence of bloom.

Capitalize on early- and late season perennial color.

Seek varieties with extended bloom.

Water: New growth requires it. Dry soil now more damaging than in summer.

Weeds: Remove them now. Smother worst areas: Better bare than distraction.

Grasp the definition of a weed.

Mulch: Recognize the importance of its color and texture.

Critical review: Of last year's notes, memories. What was gorgeous? Change it!

Telltale: Red maple; spring beauty (*Claytonia*); dwarf *Fothergilla*; *Hepatica*; lungwort (*Pulmonaria*); *Forsythia* & Japanese maple; Koreanspice *Viburnum* buds; black Jack (*Arisaema sikokianum*); dwarf iris & stone mulch; annuals & fir bark mulch; golden bleeding heart, *Aruncus*, *Cimicifuga* and variegated Solomon's seal; prairie dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*), Siberian iris and swamp buttercup.

May

Month of acquisition. Unfortunate timing.

Resist tendency to design as you shop. Marketing power; will lead you astray.

It's been a long winter -- you'll buy too few, too small, then misplace them.

Stake now, before the fall.

Grow-through arrangements simplest.

Redi-made props fine but homemade crutches often better.

After the fall:

Don't bundle and tether.

Place a pretty framework --bull's-eye/ fountain. Raise stems to the stakes.

Last resort: Tie up stems, crutch the perimeter, release the stems.

Or, just cut off the collapsed plant.

Shake hands with plants.

Plants eaten by insects, weaken or marred by disease, can't color to potential.

Learn what pests are likely for each new plant.

Anticipate pests based on past experience and head them off now.

Telltale: Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*); saucer magnolia; golden leaf myrtle; serviceberry; bigleaf forget-me-not (*Brunnera macrophylla*); cushion spurge (*Euphorbia polychroma*); bleeding heart; woodland *Phlox*; Lenten rose & Japanese maple; sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*); *Bergenia*; redbud; perennial alyssum (*Aurinia saxatilis*); yellow lady's slipper; tulips & crabapple; *Camassia cusickii*; late tulips; *Lamium maculatum*; *Geranium himalayense*, *Aruncus* & *Potentilla*; *Geranium sanguineum* with *Allium moly*; *Trillium grandiflorum*; tricolor beech; foamflower & grape hyacinth; azaleas; *Weigela*; staking *Thalictrum* & *x Veronicastrum*.

June

Color may peak but space fills. Clutter and disorganization become apparent.

Embrace the sad truth about perennial gardens:

Published accounts lie. There are no plants with season-long bloom.

In perennial combinations, harmonious contrast in shape and foliage color more valuable than bloom.

Brown may be the most powerful color.

Begin the tactic: If it's brown, cut it down. Groom or "dead-leaf."

Deadhead. Stem by stem, shearing tips or cutting back.

Cutting back hard: Removes more than 1/3 of the foliage all at once.

Must watch water as plant grows back -- don't let it dry once growth begins.

3 to 6 weeks to re-bloom. Not every species re-blooms but all look fresher.

Pinching: Clip back some or all stems to stop flower formation, restart the cycle

Telltale: Chives, bearded Iris & giant *Allium*; *Lupinus podophyllus*; Siberian iris, swamp buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*) & prairie dock; coral bells (*Heuchera sanguinea*); tree peony; dwarf lilac; *Dianthus*; kousa dogwood 'Satomi'; hybrid *Clematis*; lady's mantle; foxglove; *Hosta*; *Astrantia carniolica*; *Achillea filipendulina* & Carolina lupine (*Thermopsis caroliniana*); bottlebrush buckeye; painted fern; *Phlox maculata* hybrid & peony; *Hosta* & *Sedum sieboldii*; sea crambe (*C. maritima*); fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*); dwarf *Spiraea* & purple coneflower; soapwort & catmint.

July

Full-dimension month. Texture takes center stage. Continent in synch.

Double up wherever possible:

Spring bloomers may be voids now, and fall bloomers slow to rise.

Combine for timing of growth cycle -- lark and owl.

Pair off perennials for compatible energy level.

To allow elbow room -- mat-forming with vase shaped plants.

To tap varying resources -- shallow- with deep-rooted individuals.

Give players a fair start. A one gallon newcomer can't match an old clump.

Avoid calling attention to plants going dormant.

Be aware of human nature, too:

In high summer, a bad combo is plant tendency plus human mood.

Smarter to *plan changes* during the Dog Days than to make them!

Visit gardens, tour roadsides and natural areas. Make notes, not purchases.

New plant placement: Best planted in clusters. Avoid spottiness.

Bolster a good design with Shape-for-Shape replacements.

Telltales: Prickly pear cactus; goatsbeard (*Aruncus dioicus*) & variegated *Euonymus* 'Ivory Jade'; *Astilbe simplicifolia*; *Sedum* 'Fireglow'; smoke tree flowers; *Lysimachia ephemerum*; sundrops (*Oenothera tetragona*); daylily hybrid; lily hybrid; *Stachys micrantha*; *Ligularia* 'Rocket'; red baneberry fruit (*Actaea rubra*); doublefile *Viburnum* fruit; *Hydrangea macrophylla* variety; lacecap hydrangea; *Phlox* hybrid; *Astilbe*; oakleaf hydrangea; Joe Pye (*Eupatorium purpureum*); 'Goldsturm' blackeye Susan; Russian sage, feather reed grass & *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy'; creeping buttercup & umbrella plant (*Peltiphyllum*); snowball *Hydrangea* & grasses; Scotch moss & *Hosta*; Indian paintbrush, hawkweed & *Veratrum*; lambs ear, culinary sage & other herbs; *Thalictrum*, mouse-ear forget-me-not & late tulips; *Astilbe taquetii* 'Superba'

August

The height of the season. Are you up for it?

Annuals are! Includes volunteers, annual and perennial.

Instant cures are acceptable now, if pricey: Tropicals from indoors, perennials and woodies in pots, non-plant accessories.

Fertilizing: Not an option in high-test garden. "Not in August"? Not that simple.

Fertilize last fall, this spring? 1/2 cup 10-10-10 or 2 cups 2-2-2 / 10 sq. ft / yr.

Liquid fertilizer essential for spot feeding annuals and comeback artists.

Telltales: *Hibiscus* & *Coleus*; cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), Joe Pye & variegated false sweet flag (*Acorus calamus* 'Variegatus'); Joe Pye, dwarf perennial fountain grass, purple coneflower & butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*); panicle *Hydrangea*; ironweed (*Vernonia*) & prairie sunflower (*Helianthus Maximiliani*); sunflower & elderberry in fruit; cardinal flower & hardy water lily; golden satin grass; variegated Solomon's seal; variegated kiwi vine (*Actinidia kolomikta*); panicle *Hydrangea* seed head; doll's eyes fruit (*Actaea pachypoda*); beautyberry (*Callicarpa japonica*); cranberry *Viburnum* fruit; goldenrod (*Solidago* spp.); ornamental grasses & *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy'

September

The cool down begins. Time now to learn to let go.
Situations change. Perennials aren't permanent. Many *need* to move.
Dig, divide and relocate. Prune or plan pruning.
Division is rejuvenation. Plant grows more quickly, blooms more, larger.

Telltale: Ornamental grasses *Miscanthus* & *Schizachyrium scoparium*; *Viburnum lantana* berries; seven-son shrub (*Heptacodium*) seed pods; burning bush; sugar maples; purple bush clover (*Lespedeza thunbergii*); Japanese wax bell (*Kirengeshoma palmata*).

October

Glory of living in region of dependable fall color. Envied by many.
Leaf fall

Telltale: *Colchicum autumnale*; fall crocus (*C. kotschyianus*); New England Aster, feather reed grass, daylily, tufted hair grass, *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy' & switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*); hardy mums; *Lamium maculatum*; serviceberry.

November

Fluctuating season requires flexibility in a gardener.
Take the season if it comes.

Telltale: Red maple; sugar- & Japanese maple, grasses & perennials; *Sedum* fall color; fall fairy candle (*Cimicifuga ramosa*); Japanese maple; red blood grass & golden satin grass; Japanese maple & *Cotoneaster*; European cranberrybush *Viburnum* fall color and berry; fringetree fruit (*Chionanthus retusus*); Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*); spring witchhazel 'Jelena'; American witchhazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*).

Letting one season flow into another

Tools: Evergreens; perennial fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*) & dwarf *Spiraea* twigs; cranberrybush *Viburnum* with yew, feather reed grass, purple coneflower & burning bush; gold edge culinary sage; dwarf Oregon grapeholly (*Mahonia aquifolium* 'Compactum'); *Pieris japonica*; *Bergenia*; evergreen- & deciduous holly (*Ilex verticillata*); dawn redwood; lacebark elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*); *Stewartia pseudocamellia*; kousa dogwood; carved tree trunk; laceleaf Japanese maples; coralbark maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Sango Kaku').

The best color I have in...	I should add (color or plant)	I can also employ this tactic to improve the month's color:
...March is from		
...April is from		
...May is from		
...June is from		
...July is from		
...August is from		
...September is from		
...October is from		