

On Beyond Bloom: More color and texture for your garden

Flowers are wonderful but the best gardens employ color from other quarters, too, and gain depth from a base in plant form and texture. Photographer Steven Nikkila shares ideas to help you look at your garden, evaluate its building blocks, then improve it by way of both quick fixes and fundamental change.

I. Recognizing basic elements: Form and texture.

A. Plant form.

Draw the plant's silhouette or trace the garden's skyline

Use a variety of forms

Play one form off others

Arrange like forms to create masses and lines

B. Texture.

Picture black and white to see solid/smooth (fine) versus heavy pattern (coarse)

It's all relative: Finer than something, coarser than something!

Recognize texture in backgrounds and non-plant garden elements

Plants and garden features have texture all year

II. Impact and effectiveness of foliage color.

A. It's stand-alone color of every hue

Some plants more reliable than others

No plant is reliable that's not healthy. Right plant, right place or compost it!

B. Seasonal changes give depth to a design

Anticipate, embrace, and play off of the changes

C. Sidekick and back-up band

Light background for dark hues, coarse for fine...

III. Design and combine the basic garden

A. Steady eddies in the starring position

Begin with forms for a solid base

Add texture and foliage color in ways that support the base

B. Choose your level of drama

subtle and dramatic combinations and changes

C. Garden as life: Stable sometimes, shifting others

Build stability where it will pay off

Make shift in key accent positions

IV. Overlaying a great base with flower: Ephemeral color and pattern

A. Now see the flower as form and texture as well as hue

Coarse flower with fine leaf, columnar flower with round plant...

Note flower details, too: An eye can match a leaf, seed pod contrast a form, etc.

B. Calendar of color is a calendar of *change*

Note your overall flow, keep the good as you fill the gaps

V. Quick fixes for basic misses

A. Make some room!

Just don't forfeit what carried you last month

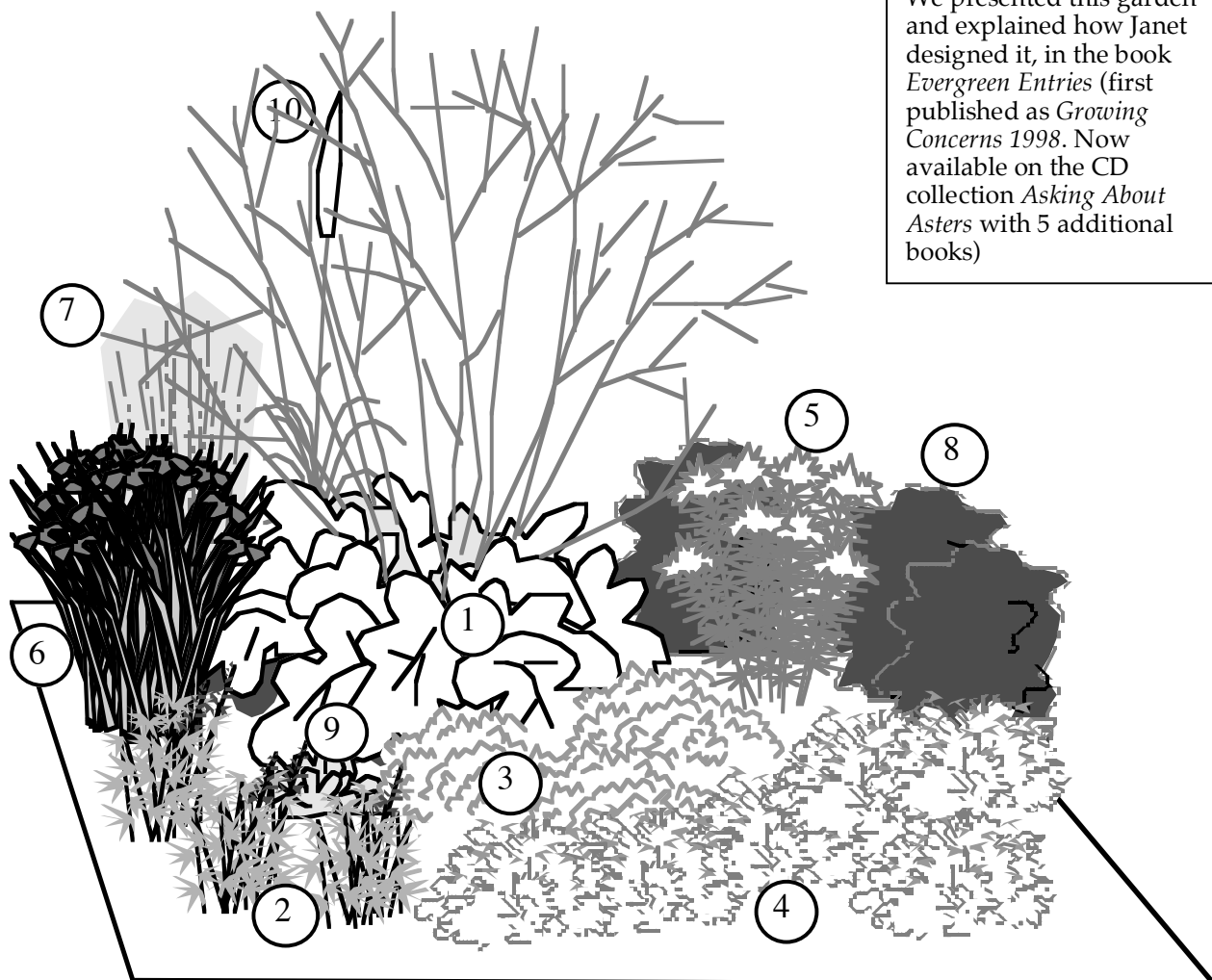
B. Non-plant fixes

"Cheating"? Well yes, and so what?!

C. We *can* make a cake without breaking eggs

VI. More ideas via garden plans

**A 6' x 8' garden where pretty flowers play second fiddle to fabulous foliage
- With an alternate plant list to make it work in a shady area -**

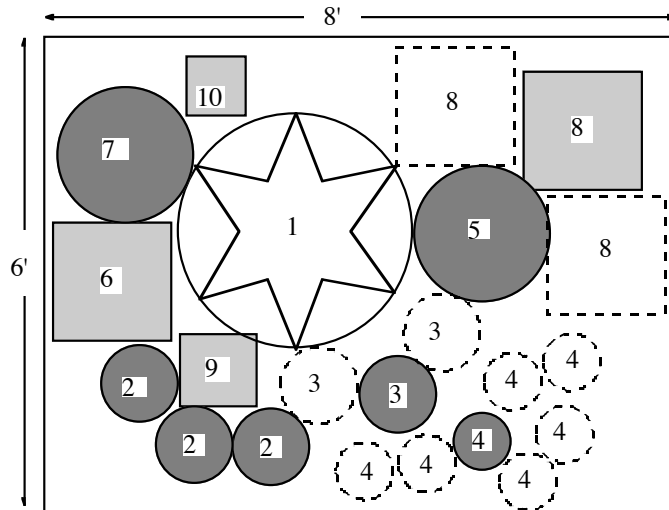


How the garden will look in late May or early June.

Siberian iris (6), foxtail lily/*Eremerus* (10), masterwort/*Astrantia* (4), and dwarf *Amsonia* (5) in bloom
dwarf goatsbeard (2) just beginning to come into bloom, and the flower stalks changing to
colorful seed heads on ornamental rhubarb (1)

The plan view for the garden on page 2: What goes where

The plan view of the garden indicates where to place each plant in a rectangle six deep and eight feet wide. to make the bed look like the drawing above.



What's where in this sunny garden:

At the focal point is the "star":

1 - Ornamental rhubarb (*Rheum palmatum atropurpureum* ROO-um pahl-MAY-tum), a 24"-30" coarse mound of big leaves that begin purple and age to green. Flower stalks up to 6' tall retain some purple in the stems all summer and the cream-green flowers on age to rosy seed pods.

Creating a ferny, fine-textured frame (gray, circular symbols):

2 - Dwarf goatsbeard (*Aruncus aethusifolius*, ah-RUN-kuhs uh-THOO-suh-foh-lee-us), 12" lacy mounds with creamy white flower spikes in

June. So cute people
3 - Silver Brocade beach

uh
aptly-named 18"

4 - Masterwort (*Astrantia carniolica* variety, ah-STRAN-chuh kar-nee-OH-lee-kuh), flowers are like tiny pincushions surrounded by a rosy ruff of long-lasting bracts; they stand on naked stems above a mound of neat foliage; blooms in May and June, bracts remain attractive most of the summer.
5 - dwarf blue star (*Amsonia* hybrid 'Blue Ice', am-SO-nee-uh), 24" tall. Bottlebrush foliage with domed clusters of blue flowers from late May into June.

Vertical accents (gray, square symbols):

6 - Siberian iris (*Iris sibirica* 'Caesar's Brother', EYE-ris sy-BEER-ih-cuh), narrow, 36" fountain of dark green grassy leaves and dark blue-violet flowers in early June. You may plant Siberian iris for its flower, but the garden comes to depend on its strong vertical lines.
7 - Boltonia (*Boltonia asteroides*, bowl-TOE-nee-uh as-ter-OY-dees), sturdy, no-stake, 5' column of light green foliage smothered in white or lilac, 1", daisy flowers in October
8 - Hybrid goldenrod (*Solidago* 'Crown of Rays', sol-ih-DAY-goh), a stiff, 24" clump topped in August with bright yellow flowers in feather-duster sprays. Goldenrod's form and texture, while respectable, is not show-stopping. So it's placed simply to make the most of its late summer floral contribution.

Providing flower during critical periods:

To bloom in gaps of this group's bloom sequence, and positioned so their come-and-go profiles blend smoothly with adjacent columnar plants (white, square symbols):

9 - California hyacinth (*Tritelia laxa* 'Queen Fabiola', tri-TEL-ee-uh LACK-suh), blue flowers in clusters on 15" stems from late June into July. Grassy foliage remains below the radar.
10 - Foxtail lily (*Eremerus* 'Shelford Hybrid', ur-REH-mur-ess), a spray of knife-blade foliage 12-18" tall in early spring launches a 3-4' leafless spear topped in late May and early June with an impressive spike of yellow, orange, salmon, white or pink flowers. They're exclamation points in a spring garden, then they go dormant after bloom.

Symbols outlined with dashed lines

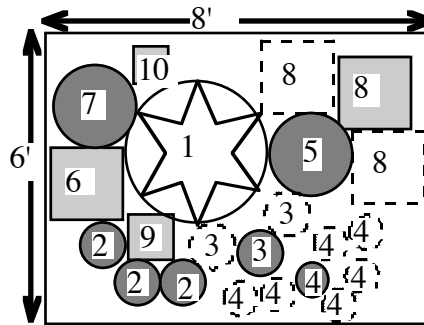
These indicate "future plants" -- where a single, original plant might be divided and spread to make a larger mass in the future.

illustrated view to garden stoop to pet it.

wormwood (*Artemisia stelleriana* 'Silver Brocade', ar-teh-MEEZ-ee-stell-LAR-ee-ah-na), An mound of grey foliage.

- The transformation: Same look, shady site -

Once a plant combination has been defined in terms of foliage and form, it can be "translated" for various sites -- individual plants replaced with others of similar leaf and profile that are better suited to the alternate site's growing conditions. Here's my translation of the sunny garden to fit a shady situation. By looking for ten plants that match the texture and shape of those I've described here, you can do a translation of this garden into annuals, interior plants, and even scale it up in size to shrubs or down in size for a patio container. Have fun!



At the focal point is:

- 1 - Rodger's flower (*Rodgersia pinnata* rod-JER-see-ah pin-NAY-tuh), a 24" mound of big leaves divided into leaflets arranged like spokes, 36" flower stalk with a creamy white plume of flowers in June.

Creating a ferny, fine-textured frame:

- 2 - Japanese painted fern (*Athyrium nipponicum* 'Pictum', ah-THEER-ee-um nip-PON-ih-cum), 15" mound of delicate, sliver- and maroon-frosted fronds
- 3 - Kabitan hosta (*Hosta sieboldii* 'Kabitan', HAHS-tuh see-BOWL-dee-eye), leaves are narrow, wavy-edged, gold with a dark green margin in a 8" mound, lilac flowers dangle from 20" flower stalks in August.
- 4 - Golden bleeding heart (*Corydalis lutea*, coh-RID-uh-liss LEW-tee-uh), ferny green foliage in a 15" mound, spangled with golden flowers May to July
- 5 - Lavender mist meadow rue (*Thalictrum rochebrunianum*, tha-LIK-trum rock-brew-nee-AY-num) 4-5' column of foliage like dangling discs, topped with a cloud of tiny lilac flowers in July

Vertical accents:

- 6 - Fall fairy candle or bugbane (*Cimicifuga ramosa*, sim-ee-SIF-yew-guh rah-MOW-suh) ferny foliage in a 2-3' mound, topped by late summer with 4-6' flower stalks that open to white bottlebrush flowers in September or October
- 7 - Turtlehead (*Chelone species*, key-LOW-nee), sturdy, no-stake, 36" stems with stiff, dark green leaves. Pink flowers like turtles' heads open in spikes in late July to mid-August.
- 8 - Variegated Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum odoratum* 'Variegatum', poh-lig-oh-NAY-tum oh-doh-RAY-tum), 18" tall, with white May flowers in paired lines below the arching stems. Leaves have a delicate white edge.

Providing flower during critical periods:

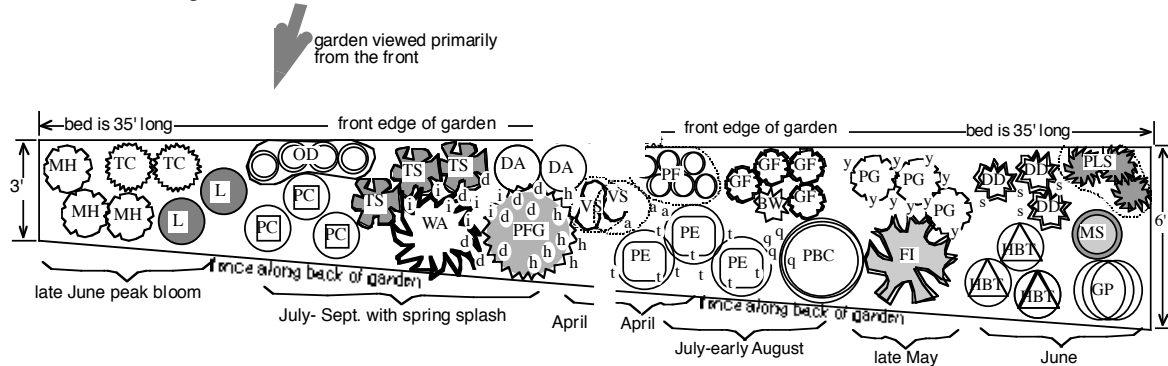
Again, these plants that provided needed flower color are also positioned so their come-and-go profiles blend smoothly with adjacent columnar plants:

- 9 - Toadlily (*Tricyrtis hirta*, try-SIR-tiss HER-tuh), 30" arching stems bear orchid-like lavender flowers in October.
- 10 - Blue bush clematis (*Clematis heracleifolia*, CLEM-ah-tis heh-RAH-clee-ih-FOH-lee-ah), 30", needs staking to maintain its columnar shape. Light blue, tube-shaped, 1" fragrant flowers open in August.

A long narrow garden for that strip along the driveway or fence

We presented this garden plan with a detailed description of its purpose and care, in our book *Evergreen Entries*.* It illustrates how much room you need for one bed to provide bloom from early spring right into fall: about 150 sq. ft. However, each section of this bed is a stand-alone small garden!

**Evergreen Entries* was first published as *Growing Concerns 1998*. It is now available on the CD collection *Asking About Asters* with 5 additional books.



Plants in this garden, by bloom time:

Late March to early April:

- i: dwarf bulb iris (*Iris reticulata*), 6", violet flowers; plant 1 to 3 bulbs at each symbol
- d: early daffodil (*Narcissus* 'February Gold'), 8-10"; yellow; plant 1-2 bulbs/ symbol

Mid-April:

- PF: pasque flower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*), 10-12", violet, red-violet or white
- VS: vernal sweet pea (*Lathyrus vernalis*), 10-12", bi-color pink-white

Late April to early May:

- h: double grape hyacinth (*Muscari armeniacum* 'Blue Spike'), 6", blue spikes, this sterile form doesn't spread; plant 1-3 bulbs/symbol
- s: summer snowflake (*Leucojum* 'Gravetye Giant'), 12-15", white bells; 1-2 /symbol
- t: early tulips (*Tulipa greigii* 'Red Riding Hood'), 10", red; 1-2 bulbs /symbol

Late May to early June:

- PG: perennial geranium (*Geranium sanguineum*), 12-15", red-violet
- y: yellow allium (*Allium moly*), 12-15", yellow starbursts; 1-2 bulbs per symbol

- WA: willow amsonia (*Amsonia tabernaemontana*), 36" sky-blue clusters

- q: quamash (*Camassia* 'Blue Danube'), 18", starry blue spikes; 1-2 bulbs/symbol

- GP: gas plant (*Dictamnus purpureus*), 36", spikes of rose-purple flowers

- FI: false indigo (*Baptisia australis*), 48", spikes of blue-violet pea-flowers

Early- to mid-June:

- MS: meadowsweet (*Filipendula vulgaris*), 15" ferny foliage, lacy white flowers on 30" stalks
- HBT: hybrid beard tongue (*Penstemon* 'Husker Red'), 36", white spikes, maroon-stems

- DD: dwarf, repeat-blooming daylily (*Hemerocallis* such as 'Squeaky' or 'Happy Returns'), 14-18", yellow trumpets

Late June to early July:

- L: lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), 12-18", violet wands over gray foliage
- TC: threadleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis* 'Moonbeam'), 15", pastel yellow "daisies"
- MH: miniature hollyhock (*Sidalcea malviflora*), pink disks on 24-30" spikes

Mid- to late July:

- BW: butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), 18", orange comb-clusters
- GF: dwarf gayfeather (*Liatris spicata* 'Kobold'), 18", violet wands
- PC: purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea* 'Magnus'), 40", big rosy "daisies"
- a: allium, purple globe (*Allium sphaerocephalum*), dark purple globes, 18-24" tall

Early August:

- PE: pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis triplinervis*), 18", white buttons, gray foliage

Mid- to late August:

- TS: tall stonecrop (*Sedum spectabile* 'Autumn Joy'), 18-24", pink flat-topped clusters
- PLS: purpleleaf sedum (*Sedum* 'Vera Jameson'), 8-10", rose clusters over maroon leaf
- PFG: perennial fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*), 36", rose-silver plumes

September and October:

- OD: October daphne (*Sedum sieboldii*), 6-8", rose flowers over blue foliage
- PBC: purple bush clover (*Lespedeza thunbergii*), 48-60", pink pea-like flowers
- DA: dwarf aster (*Aster novae-angliae* dwarf 'Purple Dome'), 15-18", purple bloom