

ESTABLISHING A PERENNIAL GARDEN

Planning preparation & Selection

Location

Choose the location before designing the garden. Assess the environmental conditions to see where an optimum site might be. Factors to consider when selecting a site include:

- Ease of access
- Site receives abundant sunshine
 - Approximately 10 hours of sunlight during in mid June.
- Adequate space to allow air circulation to avoid diseases
- Proximity to outdoor living areas
- Visibility from within the home
- Proximity to a water source
- Desire to create a focal feature in the landscape

Planning

To avoid costly mistakes it is best to begin with a plan. Using an appropriate scale, draw the proposed bed and surrounding area. Locate all existing trees, scrubs, fences, structures, lawn areas, walkways and utility lines. Sketch the desired outline of the bed. It is helpful to place a garden hose around the area to visualize the shape. Measure the line from known reference points to put it on the plan.

Beds are easier to maintain when they are easily accessible. Choose a location that can be accessed from at least two sides. A maximum width of 8 feet works well.

The majority of perennials are deciduous in winter so the inclusion of evergreen shrubs can provide background structure and provide winter interest. These evergreens can also provide a dark green background for colorful blossoms.

Soil preparation.

If the site is where there is presently turf grass there are two methods of eliminating the sod.

- A. Spray the area of interest with non-select herbicide. (glyphosate). With in several days you can tile the sod over while adding amendments (composed mulch).
- B. Cover the planning area with black plastic sheet for at least two months. Then tile in soil amendments.

Soil amendments: A soil rich in organic matter (humus) will lighten the, soil, make it more workable, dry out slower and protect root systems from frost damage. Till in large amounts of peat moss or composted leaf much initially. Add more leaf compose late each autumn. A razed garden bed is superior to one at round level. It remains well drained, therefore resist flood damage and eventually fungus diseases.

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Plant Selection

- The most important consideration in selecting plants is to group them according to their environmental and cultural requirements. A drought-tolerant plant may not thrive in moist conditions nor will a shade plant thrive in full sun.
- Begin with a color scheme. Consider the color of your home or surrounding areas for flower color choices.
- Include leaf texture and color in plant considerations.
- Choose a variety of types that will provide an extended bloom time across the seasons.
- To create masses of color, texture and shapes, plant in “drifts” by placing like plants in groups of three, five or seven (odd numbers) of each type to increase the effect of color. When spacing plants, allow plenty of room for the expansion of each clump. Each grows differently, but as a rule allow at least 1 foot between every plant in a clump, and 2 or more feet between each clump.
- Repeat groups of the same plant type two or three times throughout the space, to give it unity and create harmony.
- Use tall plants at the back of a one-sided garden or in the middle of an island bed.
- Compliment tall plants by gradually placing shorter plants towards the out perimeter, ending with low border plants at the edge of the bed. This creates a smooth transition from tall heights to the border plants. Bring occasional plants forward from their height line to increase variation.
- Use various colors, textures, and forms to add interest. Too much variety, however will over stimulate the viewer. Consider using more plants of fewer varieties for a simpler and more pleasing effect. Don’t overuse one type of perennial.
- Consider bloom time and interesting foliage to create a succession of color and interest throughout the season.
- Compliment perennials with annuals and bulbs for bright focal points and accents during low bloom periods
- Leave room for plant growth and allow for individual plant growth habits. In general, plant tall perennials 18-36 inches apart, intermediates 12-18 inches apart and dwarf 6-12 inches apart.
- Don’t plant plants in straight rows – use a scattered or triangular spacing so one pass blends into another.

Complimentary - Using primary colors directly across from each other on the color wheel. (Yellow and purple are popular as a wide variety of perennials are available in these colors.)

Split-complementary harmony – rather than going directly across the color wheel from a primary color, select one of the colors to the left or right of the one opposite. Using a bright red monarda, allows not only green but the option of using either a blue or a yellow flower.

Analogous harmony – use two colors next to each other on the color wheel. Because these colors are much closer in temperature this scheme will not have a noticeable contrast thereby creating a more soothing combination. Blues and violets are cool, yellow and oranges warm.

Monochromatic – uses a main color and the closest hues. This scheme makes a small garden seem larger because the eye is not

A note on white. White serves as a buffer between colors that might ordinarily not co- White also provides a brightening effect in a shade garden or a dark corner.

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