

Using Contrast Can Give Gardens a New Look

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Thursday, May 30, 2002

When I went looking for new plants for this summer's garden I came up empty handed. Not surprising, as our very narrow, horticultural zone 8, which hops and skips from coastal South Carolina west to California and then north to Washington state, supports a limited number of plants. Sandwiched as we are between the cold temperate zones and the hot tropics, a really new plant to Tallahassee would be cause for celebration. We have more success relying on new cultivars of old favorites and evaluating underused plants with a new eye.

Color is in! Brightness and contrast are taking over our pastel beds and borders, giving us the newest look in many years. Annuals, usually the most colorful flowers, give us a chance to try out a new scheme every year. New 'Wave' petunias are a good place to start. They now come in brilliant blues and purples as well as bright pink, and they spill cascades of color, filling sunny areas in the blink of an eye. A lovely, newish, light yellow marigold, 'Lemon Gem', ten inches tall, sparkles with small flowers and is terrific next to flowers with yellow centers. Colors work best when they have something in common with their neighbors.

A good foil with bright colors is white *Angelonia angustifolia* 'Angelmist'. A steady performer full of tiny flowers most of the summer, it adds weight as well as zip. The blue variety is a winner too.

Green flowers and purple-brown leaves are also an "in" thing this year. A new green hydrangea called 'Limelight' sounds curious and *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Green Wizard' sounds interesting, a green sunflower that grows four to five feet tall! New gardeners might wonder why anyone would intentionally plant green flowers or foliage until they see them against dark foliage. Lime green *Lysimachia nummularia* looks better wandering near purple-brown *Coreopsis* 'Mahogany Midget', for instance, than with other greens. Brownish foliage may sound like a downer but it is a valuable quick change artist. One plant in the right place, say the jungle look of elephant ears, *Alocasia plumbea* 'Black Knight', or a dark leaved canna, adds depth and drama. This takes careful planning. Strong contrasts aren't always easy as size, shape, and compatibility come into play.

Variegated green and yellow *Artemisia* 'Oriental Limelight' lightens an area of green, especially if there is a yellow flower nearby. Lacy, silvery-gray *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle', is still one of the best fillers. It lifts a perennial border and adds elegance to colored flowers. Even zinnias look sophisticated. *Artemisia* does well in hot weather but may melt in too much rain.

I was recently introduced to, and like very much, *Plectranthus eklonii*, a graceful shrub with small purple flowers that fall in racemes. I planted it near another favorite, *Salvia blepharophylla*, the eye-lash sage, which has green and purple foliage. I hope, they will complement each other and intensify their purple colors. Small, insignificant flowers bloom in late summer.

I have heard raves about, but have not seen, the new shrub rose 'Knockout'. A beautiful red color, it is said to be almost disease free. Another heard-of plant, anxiously awaited, is the Korean lilac 'Miss Kim'. Smaller than northern lilacs and in the typical lilac color, if it does come our way it would, indeed, be something to celebrate.

For more information about gardening in our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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