Summertime Cottage Gardening

Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension

Jennifer Bronson is an employee of Tallahassee Nurseries and member of the University of Florida Leon County Extension horticulture advisory committee. For more local gardening information, visit http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/

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The beauty of a cottage style garden does not have to end with the cool weather. As the heat pours in so do summer blooming annuals, perennials, and herbs! Since the hallmark of a cottage garden is an abundant array of colorful, fragrant plants, it is easy to keep that cozy look going all the way through our steamy days!

There are no specific rules to cottage style gardening, which is part of the reason it is loved by so many gardeners. But, there are some basic elements that help to create the look. For instance, the same idea of having a tall, medium, mounding, and trailing variety of plants still applies to the summer cottage gardens. This can be done in tiers or at random by bringing one tall growing specimen to the front of the garden. It all just depends on the look you want.

Color is the main stylistic element. Some gardeners may prefer a complete riot of colors, mixing everything from red pentas, blue salvias, and yellow coneflowers with purple angelonia, white plumbago, and pink lantanas. This has a truly wild effect where no one plant stands out on its own but instead creates a color wheel of joy! A more structured plan would be to plant flowers that have similar tones such as the antique colors of pink roses, cream colored salvias, white scaevola, lilac petunias, and the silver of lamb’s ears. This can also be done with bright tones such as combining orange celosia, golden zinnias, black-eyed susans, sunset lantana, and then set them all off with purple salvias!
Foliage color is another element to remember for that cottage garden look. Coleus is a prime example of foliage color for summer gardens. Sporting bright colors that add interest all through the heat, coleus are durable annuals with immediate impact. Other foliage plants include Magilla perilla, dichondra, plectranthus, alternanthera, and amaranth. Showy foliage plants not only stand out in the garden but also work to accent the blooming plants!

Summer is show-time for perennials, which can be incorporated into a cottage style garden with ease. Here are a few to look for: cutleaf coneflower (*Rudbeckia laciniata*), ‘Lion’s Ear’ (*Leonotis menthifolia*), ‘Yellow Bells’ (*Tecoma stans*), ‘Walker’s Low’ catmint (*Nepeta faassenii*), tall garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), and shrimp plant (*Justicia brandegeana*).