



Stare at the X in the **YELLOW** circle for about 30 seconds.

Then, stare at the X in the WHITE circle. What do you see?



The Gardener as Artist

Nina A. Koziol, www.beautyandthefeast.net 708/ 217-9357

"It is the knitting together of so many distinct individuals into a harmonious whole greater than the sum of its parts that makes a garden a garden." – "Elements of Design" by Joe Eck (1996)

There's much to be said about the importance of garden structure, such as paths, patios, arbors, trellises, pergolas and decks. Structure, or hardscape, serves as the groundwork before we begin adding the eye candy--in this case, flowers. But most any gardener can relate to this: you get to the garden center in spring and go gaga over all the stuff that's in bloom. You load up the car with a floral fantasy of pots without giving much thought about what will go where or with what. After a long, miserable winter, it's easy to get swept away with flowering plants and that's ok. Flowers, with all their colorful exuberance – are likely one of the main reasons you were attracted to gardening in the first place.

But, just as an artist moves paint from palette to canvas, the gardener's art lies in creating a colorful arrangement of flowers and foliage that harmonize and complement one another. A planting of beefy burgundy-leaved cannas, orange zinnias, red-leaved fountain grass, salmon calibrachoa and bronze-leaved coleus makes for a hot-colored tapestry that feels tropical and exotic. At the other extreme is a grouping of pale blue ageratum, pastel pink roses and white sweet alyssum, which creates a cool, soothing, classical English-garden combination.

Let's consider the color wheel, which can help hone the hues in your plantings. A very basic color wheel is composed of six colors: primary colors, which are red, yellow and blue, and secondary colors, which are green, orange and violet.

Complementary colors are those that are directly opposite one another on the color wheel, such as red and green, orange and blue, yellow and violet. Combine complementary colors, such as yellow achillea and violet salvia and both become more vibrant and intense than when they are grouped alone. Harmonious colors are those that appear next to one another on the color wheel such as green and blue, yellow and white, red and orange.

Before you focus on what colors you like, consider the backdrop for your plants – against a fence, the house or garage, in a window box or flower pot. The background color can make a difference. A brick or wood wall that's brown, reddish-brown or orange will be a good backdrop for warm-colored flowers and foliage. A taupe, grey or white background lends itself to shades of white, pink, blue, purple and lemon-yellow.

The well-dressed garden border features eye-catching combinations with continuous but varying displays of color throughout the growing season. Subtle differences in weather from year to year, however, mean that perennials won't always bloom at the same time. Filling in bare spots with annuals can help extend a colorful display and you can strive for a different effect each year by changing the annuals you use. Hone your

gardening skills by recording bloom times in a journal, so that you mix and match the color groupings you like.

If you don't quite trust your grasp of painting with flowers, or are reluctant to blow your whole gardening allowance at once, try one combination at a time. In her book, "Gardening-Making" (1926), Elsa Rehman describes how she designed one small garden to sport a more complex palette each year. She began with an elegant combination of white, blue and yellow flowers. The next year she added maroon snapdragons and cherry-colored dahlias. The beds became livelier a year later with yellow marigolds and orange calendulas, zinnias, and dahlias. Finally, she made them more beautiful by using complementary waves of blue with ageratum, salvia, and larkspur.

"That is the real joy of a garden," Rehman writes. "Every year promises a new venture, leading you from the simples of experiences into the color wealth of flowers."

Recipes for Color Combos

For a dramatic visual impact, combine complementary colors – those on the opposite sides of a color wheel. Examples are yellow and violet, red and green, blue and orange. Placed next to each other, complementary colors appear more vibrant than when standing alone.

If you're uncertain whether certain color combinations look good together, try using white flowers or silver foliage, such as lamb's ears, pulmonaria (lung wort) or artemisia to make the scene more cohesive.

Don't overlook colorful foliage, such as canna lilies, ornamental grasses and caladium to add spots of color.

You can create eye-catching combinations in shady spots using plants such as chartreuse-leaved hakonechloa grass with orange-flowering tuberous begonias and blue-leaved hostas. In shady spots, we rely more on contrasting textures, unusual foliage or flowers, including that provided by many native plants, colorful pots or perhaps a standing stone or obelisk to create visual interest.

Here's to Hue: Terms to Know

Hue: Another name for color

Primary colors: Red, yellow and blue. They're called primary because they cannot be made by mixing other colors (with paint) together.

Secondary colors: Orange, green and violet. Artists can create these colors by mixing various other pigments.

Complementary: Colors that appear opposite one another on the color wheel, such as red and green, orange and blue, yellow and violet. Combining complementary colors makes them more vibrant and intense. After staring at a specific color and looking away at a white background, your mind's eye creates the opposite color. Providing both colors together makes them appear more intense.

Harmonious: Colors that appear next to one another on the color wheel, such as green and blue, purple and violet, yellow and white, red and orange. A garden designed with a single color as the emphasis, such as a "blue" border, could use many harmonious shades of blue, blue-green, and violet or purple.

Monochromatic: A theme using one color, such as an all-blue or all-white garden.

Warm: Red, orange and yellow. These colors tend to be exciting, vibrant, and tropical.

Cool: Green, blue and violet. These colors are soothing and soft.

Tint: The result of mixing white with any color. Typically this term is used more for painters, but you can get the same effect by pairing orange flowers next to pale corals. (Zinnias and day lilies, for example.)

Shade: The result of mixing black with any color. Shades are simply more saturated colors. Red is a shade, while pink is a tint.

Key Color: The dominant color used in a color scheme. Think about what dominant color you prefer and which complements your house.

GARDENS THAT WOW! -- YOU are the Artist!

Gardeners don't often think of themselves as artists yet they create a living, ever-changing three-dimensional work of art, a breathing, nurtured sculpture. Their work is experienced and enjoyed with the changing light of dawn, mid-day and dusk – and by the flow of the seasons.

As a gardener artist, you work with composition – with colors, textures, contrasts and moods. You work with a style – formal or informal – and with themes – moon gardens, water gardens, cutting gardens, conifer gardens and Japanese-style gardens, among others.

Gardeners face additional creative challenges that painters, writers and composers may not.

* Unlike the artist who works on a blank canvas or paper, you may have inherited an existing "work of art," and must modify it to create your own art.

* You work with an ever-changing set of parameters – light, heat, cold, sun, too much water, not enough water, disease, pests., and time to maintain your work. Like any art

form, gardening begins with borrowing. Your design may be influenced by: Mentors: family, friends, neighbors, teachers, other gardeners

- Places: private or public gardens you have visited and enjoyed
- Books, movies, songs
- A need for sanctuary – a place to get away and recharge or reflect

Draw inspiration from:

- * Open spaces – meadows and prairies
- * Urban settings--garden rooms and courtyards
- * Forests--woodland settings where shade is a respite from the sun
- * Travel--places you've visited
- * Art--the gardens and flowers of Monet, Picasso, Rembrandt
- * Photographs
- * Music (think Aaron Copland's Appalachian Spring)
- * Poetry and essays...

I'll leave you with one of my favorite quotes:

“Spring is the inspiration, fall the expiration. Both seasons have their equinoxes, both their filmy, hazy air, their ruddy forest tints, their cold rains, their drenching fogs, their mystic moons; both have the same solar light and warmth, the same rays of the sun; yet, after all, how different the feelings they inspire. One is morning, the other the evening; one is youth, the other is age.”

-- From “A Year in the Field,” by American naturalist John Burroughs (1837-1921).