

I pledged I would never walk into a wonderfully stocked garden center in the spring again, at least not without a plan in hand. What a gardener's delight, that expanse of riotous color, form and texture! As a gardener yourself, you know how the unprepared gardener can be pulled in by the excitement of the visual senses, otherwise known as spring fever. Well, I suffered from spring fever in the garden center yesterday and ended up with a conglomeration of plants and nowhere to put them yet. Not only is the garden plan non-existent, the soil that will be home to the plants' tiny little roots has not even been prepared!

Before you step into your favorite garden store this spring, make your plans for that new dreamy flower bed. To lesson your work and increase your enjoyment, make sure that you buy plants that are well suited to the site of their new garden home. Check out how much sun the new flower bed gets, if the soil is more often dry or moist, or if there will be reflected light and heat from nearby pavement or walls. When you actually make your plant choices for the area, make sure they all have the same cultural requirements – Right plant, Right place.

Mix different plant shapes, leaf textures and sizes to help make your garden appealing. Your eye will follow around the garden, stopping to enjoy all the surprises and differences that you have planned. Use odd numbers in groupings and place taller groups to the back of the viewing area and shorter ones to the front. The different groups should flow naturally in and around each other instead of growing in straight and boring rows.

Decide what your garden can do for you, not what you can do for your garden. Would you like to view it in the evening twilight because of your work schedule? Try using white flowering plants and plants with variegated green and white foliage. The flowers seem to glow in the darkening shadows of dusk, offering a calming and tranquil setting for relaxation at the end of a busy day.

If you like fun and energizing sunny gardens, try shades of yellows, oranges and reds. Gardens can be planned with different shades of just one color, or they can be mixed with three or four colors in a pleasing color scheme. Yellow and orange flowering plants show up well from a distance, too. They have a way of pulling the background forward, making distant things look closer to the viewer. Yellows and oranges can also perk up a shady spot, along with touches of white.

Shades of purple, blues and pinks are 'cool' colors and can make a hot day seem a little more comfortable. We tend to unwind and relax in a cool color garden. These colors, however, seem to fade into the scenery if used in the distance or in the shade. They need some interplay of light to reflect soothing color to your eyes. Green fits into this color palette, also, so this 'cool' color garden would be an ideal home for some of your favorite foliage plants.

I love to see a surprise in any color schemed garden. An orange blossom appearing in the midst of a blue garden is a pleasant unexpected contrast, even adding a little comic relief to a quiet, somber garden. Blossom hues that vie with each other for our attention are also attractive in an energetic garden. Use shades of purples with oranges, blues with yellows, or reds with yellows to make a lively garden. The use of colors can shape the mood of your garden spaces.

Need help with plant selection? Visit your local nurseryman or go to <http://solutionsforyourlife.com> The UF Master Gardeners can also help you on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 752-5384. *(Published 3-22-09)*

