

# Flower color influences human mood

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

I had the opportunity to visit some delightful Galveston gardens during last weekend's annual Backyard Garden Tour. While I was interested in the landscape plants, I was particularly interested in observing how other visitors were drawn to certain color beds.

I later remembered reading a study conducted by Dr. Roger Ulrich, a professor of landscape architecture at Texas A&M University. His research was the first to scientifically document the stress-reducing and health-related benefits for hospital patients of viewing nature. Ulrich's studies showed that when flowers were visible to hospital patients, their need for pain medication decreased, their stress levels dropped and their stay in the hospital was marked with increased optimism.

While my professional training is in the plant sciences, I find it intriguing how different colors and textures of flowers and plants also can influence the human mood and perception. Most people like a bright, colorful landscape, but did you know that you can use the colors of flowers and plants to create a mood, shorten or lengthen the look of a garden or really call attention to a special feature? It's possible because of the way we perceive colors.

Hey Look Me Over!

Red and yellow are two colors

that immediately capture our attention. Behavioral scientists tell us we actually see these two colors faster than others. Our eyes are drawn to displays of red or yellow, so they are excellent choices to put around a fountain or to plant in a key area that you want people to see.

Likewise, if you have something in your garden you don't want people to look at, plant bright yellow flowers opposite that area to draw attention away from it. Ideally, they will look at the yellow flowers and turn their backs on whatever eyesore it is you want to hide.

If you have steps leading to your garden or in your garden, consider planting a border of yellow flowers next to them. The yellow will catch people's eyes and alert them in an attractive way that there are steps, and they should be careful.

Is your garden area long and narrow, and would you like to square it off a little with minimal effort? Plant lots of bright red flowers at the far end, and this will visually pull that end in closer and it won't seem so long and narrow. This can be done with anything you want to bring closer, because red "advances" visually.

Masses of red or yellow are guaranteed attention-getters and will not go unnoticed. And, by the way, men tend to favor yellow-based reds (like scarlet), while women tend to

favor blue-based reds (like burgundy). If you and your spouse don't agree on what "red" to plant, this could be why.

## Crisp And Clean

If you are the type of person who likes things neat, tidy and precise, white is the color for you. We think of doctors in their white coats and laboratories with white walls and equipment because we associate this color in our environment with cleanliness, orderliness and precision.

Crisp flower beds or border plantings of white will give your garden a well-planned and orderly look. But don't expect the color alone to do all the work — you still will need to tend to your garden.

Masses of white can be hard on the eyes, so you might want to include areas of other colors as well.

White is also the last color to fade from sight as darkness falls so it's a good choice for areas you want to look at in the evening and also a good choice for bordering pathways since you can follow your way easier even as it gets dark.

## Keeping Your Cool

When our field of vision is filled with blue, our bodies actually slow down, and we begin to get calmer. You can use this attribute of blue to create a feeling of coolness



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even in a full-sun garden by planting lots of blue flowers (lighter blues are better than dark blues).

Even if it's 95 degrees, you'll feel cooler in the blue area of your garden.

#### Let The Good Times Roll

What if you like lots of different colors mixed in among each other? That's great. Mixes of bright colors give a happy festive look to an area.

Mix different flowers, different colors and different textures to your heart's delight, but just be careful not to overdo it. Too much mixing can look more disorganized than festive, so using three or four colors again and again can help tie the look together.

If you haven't thought about the psychological effects of color before, these tips might give you a starting point for creating not only the look you want in your garden but also the feel you want as well.

