

Adding Seasonal Color in the Fall Landscape

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



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The human eye is instantly drawn to color. Different flower colors should be arranged in masses or groups to allow each color to be noticed.

The 2020 fall season technically commenced yesterday (September 22) at 8:30 a.m. As Tropical Storm Beta moved closer to making landfall, we actually received some noticeably cooler weather last Saturday. The arrival of cooler weather conditions of the fall season is a transitional time for Gulf Coast landscapes—especially after a warm and humid summer season.

Many warm-season annuals have finished or are finishing their color displays. In anticipation of cooler weather, gardeners' thoughts are beginning to turn to cool-season bedding plants to add dramatic splashes of color to the fall, winter and spring landscape.

When you decide it's time to replant flower beds and containers, you can choose from lots of wonderful cool

-season bedding plants available. Excellent choices include pansy, dianthus, sweet alysum, petunia, sweet William, nicotiana, ornamental kale and cabbage, and dusty miller, to name a few.

The colors available in these cool-season bedding plants are virtually unlimited. Now, here's the hard part—don't plant your garden with





every color you can get your hands on. I know it is hard to resist, but what you will end up with is chaos-in-the-landscape that is not as effective as a well-thought-out color scheme.

Color is an extremely important factor in how we perceive and appreciate our landscapes. You should think about your color scheme and what you are trying to accomplish with color in your landscape. Here are some quick tips on color to get you started.

- **Combine cool colors together or warm colors together for reliably harmonious results.** The colors within each group naturally combine well and look good together. Cool colors include reds with a blue tint, burgundy, rose, pink, magenta, purple, violet, lavender, blue, navy and any variations of those colors.

Warm colors include reds with an orange tint, orange, gold, yellow, rust, peach and any variations on these colors. White combines equally well with either group, and true blue flowers also look good with just about any other color.

- **Use color where you want to focus attention.** The human eye is instantly drawn to color. Never use color to “beautify” an unattractive feature in your landscape such as a fire hydrant, storage shed or trash can area. You will simply make sure everyone notices it, and the color will not make it look any better.

- **Use color where you can enjoy it.** Many gardeners lavish their atten-

tion and garden budget on their front gardens, and this is a wonderful gift they provide to their neighborhood. But when little or nothing is done in the back area where the family spends most of their time, I think that is unfortunate.

Don’t forget to include plantings of colorful cool-season bedding plants in beds, containers and hanging baskets around the patio and other outdoor living areas. Fragrant plants such as alyssum, and nicotiana are especially nice.

- **Reduce the number of colors you use for best results.** In other words, as a general rule use the colors you like in combinations that you like, but don’t use every color you like at the same time in the same bed.

- **Plant in mass or groups.** It is also important to arrange different flower colors in masses or groups, especially if the bed will be viewed from a distance (as in a front bed being viewed from the street). If, for instance, you decide to use red, pink and white petunias, it is more effective to plant groups (three or more plants) of red, groups of pink and groups of white in the bed. This allows each color to be noticed. A scattered planting of individual red, pink and white petunias would give the overall appearance of pink when viewed from a distance.

- **Effective use of pastel colors.** Use pastel colors in areas that will

be viewed primarily in the evening. Paler colors show up better in low light, of course. This is also an important consideration when planting shady areas. Also, pastel colors make a space look larger and more open. If you have a courtyard that seems a little cramped, a pastel color scheme would be quite appropriate. Cool, pastel colors also tend to create a serene, restful mood.

- **Effective use of vibrant colors.** Vibrant, rich colors energize the landscape and can help make a larger area seem smaller and more intimate. Combining colors that are complementary on the color wheel such as blue and orange, purple and yellow, or red and green is particularly energetic. Combining white with the primary colors, red, blue and yellow is also cheerful and lively. A patriotic red, white and blue color scheme is sure to brighten an area as well.

Creating an attractive, colorful look is easier than ever. But do a little thinking and planning before you go to the nursery, and you will generally be more pleased with the results. Above all, have fun. After all, if the color scheme isn’t as great as you thought it would be, it’s only there for a season. You can always try something different next time.

