

JUNE'S GARDEN

DIRT, and Then Some!

Trees and shrubs are the backbone of a garden. They provide the background for flowering plants. When placing these permanent plants, give thought to their full growth of width and height. If planted too close together, in time some will have to be removed: a lesson many of us impatient gardeners fail to remember when we are anxious to fill in empty spaces. Proper spacing is very important.

When you have decided what plants best suit your site, for a more interesting contrast mix evergreens with deciduous trees and shrubs. There is a wide range of different colors of foliage besides the many shades of green: grey, grey-blue, silver, purple or bronze, yellow, yellow-green, and those whose foliage turns shades of gold or red in the fall.

If you live as close to the ocean front as I do, the foliage of some deciduous trees and shrubs could be wind-burned by the salt-laden winds off the coast. The leaves of a tall maple tree I planted some years ago turn brown before it turns a golden color in the fall. Two other shrubs affected by the wind are a tall shrub (*Viburnum opulus*) and a *Laurustina* (*Viburnum tinus*). I had been recommended to plant the *Laurustina*, a tough, hardy winter-blooming shrub, in an unprotected area that is in the path of the winter winds. By spring, all the leaves have turned brown and the plant rarely produces winter flowers. In a more protected area, the foliage of blueberries and an *Eyonumus alatus compacta* labeled 'Burning Bush' never turn brown but both turn shades of red by October.

Adding trees and shrubs that produce flowers and berries will attract a variety of birds. The 'Apple Blossom' escallonia and hardy fuchsia shrubs draw Rufus humming birds to feed from the nectar of the flowers. Native plants of Twin-berry (*Lonicera involucrata*), Red-berried Elder (*Sambucus callicarpa*), and Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*), all bear fruit and grow along with my cultivated plants. Mountain ash (*Pyrus sitchensis*), a native tree found in the mountain forests along the coast, is a small tree that blooms white blossoms in the spring followed by bunches of bright red fruit in the fall, and is much loved by birds,

especially robins and varied thrushes. These trees are available at garden centers, and are worth adding to your garden.

For continuous performances of colorful flowers I fill in the bare spaces between the trees and shrubs with herbaceous perennials. When you choose perennials, become familiar with their time of bloom, whether they grow best in full sun or shade, and their growth habits. Some send out underground runners which in a few years will take over a flower bed. There are others that stay in clump form. Most perennials need dividing every three years or so. The best time to divide plants is in the spring when they first show their growth. There are enough varieties to choose from that bloom from early spring into late fall. Tall plants need to be staked for support before they get too tall and lop over or cover smaller plants planted near them. Shasta daisies that grow well in our coastal weather can be sheared back 2 or 3 inches when they reach to about a foot and a half tall. This causes the plant to branch out and produce more flower buds and not grow as leggy. Some perennials will continue to bloom if you keep them dead-headed by cutting off all blossoms that start to fade.

I'd never grown dahlias before I moved to the coast, but they now have become one of my favorite flowers. They are dependable and add continuous color from early July into late fall. The smaller shaped flowers of Pom-Poms and Water-lily varieties are not as overwhelming as the blossoms of what is described as dinner-plate size. Various heights of plants are available. Dahlias are described as half-hardy. I've never lifted the tubers in the fall to protect them from a deep freeze. I cut back the stems after the first frost and add a layer of mulch. Our coastal winter weather does have frequent heavy rain storms and high winds, but the temperature is usually milder than the interior of Oregon. Standing water will rot the bulbs. Mine are planted in raised beds which have good drainage. In time I do separate the tubers when the clump has grown too large. If the tubers are crowded, it will cause weak stems and fewer blossoms. I plant them in well-prepared soil and use fertilizer that's low in nitrogen. Swan Lake dahlia growers advise using fertilizer that is high in potassium and phosphorus, either labeled 5-10-10 or 10-20-20. Avoid fish fertilizer or other high-nitrogen fertilizer. Too much nitrogen will produce more leaves than flowers.

Contrast adds interest. For variety, combine plants of different colors, forms, textures, and varied heights. Complementary colors of flowers planted in drifts help to unify a landscape. Pale muted colors are more easily used together, giving the landscape a softer look. Bright pure colors stand out and are best used as highlights. When experimenting with color combinations, it is helpful to be able to distinguish between the purple-pink that has a bit of blue in it, or coral-pink that's tinted with orange. Coordinating colors have similar tones.

Note: some of the above paragraph is quoted from an article in the June issue of *Country Living Gardener*, 'The 3 C's of Combining Plants,' by Rita Buchanan. This is an article worth reading on how to choose partners that complement, coordinate, or contrast successfully.

Continued next month:
'DIRT and Then Some'

Correction of July column: my raised beds are a foot deep, not an inch deep.

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When a man has pity on all living creatures, then only is he noble.
Buddha

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