

NON-FLOWER GARDENS

# 50 SHADES OF GREEN, PLUS OTHER COLORS



Costa Farms via AP

This photo shows Patriot Hosta's variegated green and white leaves and are a great choice in a non-flower garden, says Justin Hancock of Costa Farms.

By KIM COOK  
Associated Press

While beds tumbling with flowers are lovely, there's an emerging trend in landscape design: the flowerless garden.

Non-traditional gardens are no less green. In fact, the hue is often more obvious than in a floral-filled space. Varieties of leafy shrubs, trees, vines and grasses create a verdant vista, even in small gardens. An additional perk: these gardens may be significantly easier to maintain than a plot full of posies.

Justin Hancock of Costa Farms, a nursery in Miami, describes two types of non-traditional gardens: "One is a soothing, naturalistic garden that's filled with different shades of green," he says. "The other is a little more flamboyant and uses variegated plants to bring in splashes of color."

Both offer a pleasing aesthetic in all seasons, and you don't need to worry about plants going in and out of bloom.

## SERENITY

A Zen-like garden keeps the focus on the garden structure itself, with greenery that's calming.

Shawn Fitzgerald of the Kent, Ohio-based Davey Tree Company, thinks hardscaping should also be a consideration in these gardens.

"A water feature always adds a nice element — a pond, or a creek, with the



"One of my favorite ways to make a small space feel larger is to plant varieties that have rich green, purple, or orange foliage up front, and incorporate white-variegated leaves at the back," says Justin Hancock of Costa Farms. Forever Purple Heuchera and Campfire Coleus paint a vivid portrait in a garden without flowers.

sound of running water. It's especially nice if you have some lush foliage over the water," he says.

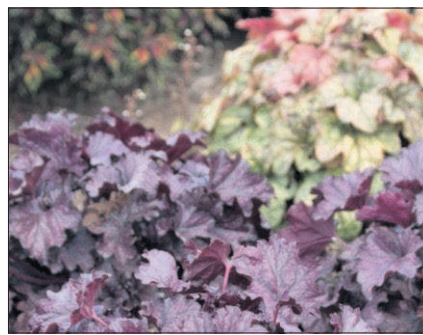
He encourages adding of rocks, perhaps some large and small boulders strategically placed.

"And, of course, benches are always great," Fitzgerald says. "Who doesn't like to sit and reflect in a peaceful garden, under some nice shade cover?"

## VISUAL INTEREST

Hancock suggests using variegated shrubs or trees to add color and texture to a garden. Give similarly hued plants like hostas, dusty miller and succulents a tonal frame by placing them next to bluestone pavers, he suggests. Or play with scale perception by graduating dark and light greenery along a pathway.

"One of my favorite ways to make



a small space feel larger is to plant varieties that have rich green, purple, or orange foliage up front, and incorporate white-variegated leaves at the back. Because the light color recedes, it creates an optical illusion of more space," he says.

No matter what hardiness zone you're in, there's one annual he recommends for any non-traditional garden.

"Coleus is one of the most versatile foliage plants you can choose. Some tolerate full sun, but most grow in shade, too," he says. "You can get varieties in so many colors. Redhead, which is a personal favorite; Campfire, which is purple and orange; chartreuse Wasabi; gold Honeycrisp. Plant these in the spring, and enjoy them right through the fall."

Sweet potato vine is another easy-care annual, with multi-colored varieties.

"On the perennial side, hostas are beautiful shade plants that thrive from Alaska way down to Texas," says Hancock. "Variegated liriopse has a wide planting range, and has deep green, grassy leaves edged in gold or silver."

Heuchera, also known as coral bells, "is another perennial that, like coleus, offers tremendous versatility with leaves in a wide range of colors, and varieties that thrive in sun or shade," Hancock says.

Fitzgerald recommends palm trees for southern zones 8-11. Gardeners in the Mid-Atlantic might consider cool-season grasses that bloom early, and warm-season ones that bloom at summer's end. For the Northeast, varieties of conifers provide year-round greenery.

Hancock's pick for a great North American native shrub is ninebark.

"It's practically bulletproof, and offers colorful foliage," he says. "Diabolo is an older variety that has deep purple leaves from spring to fall and grows big, making it a stunner. Dart's Gold is a smaller variety, with golden-chartreuse leaves."

Red twig dogwood, elderberry and variegated Japanese white pine would also provide all-season interest, he notes.

"The key to a garden where flowers aren't the focus is foliage," says Fitzgerald. "There are lots of trees, shrubs and plants with stems, fruit and foliage of different sizes, shapes and textures. Just because there aren't flowers doesn't mean your garden can't be colorful."

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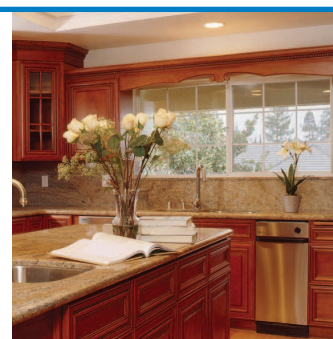
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