

## **Garden Diversity**

### **The value of non-segregated plantings**

I have observed that many gardeners think of annuals and perennials as quite different kinds of things, and vegetable plants as still more distant and different, instead of all just being parts of the big world of plants we have found pleasant to have in our gardens. This may be mostly the fault of those of us growing and selling plants to home gardeners – plant propagators might choose to specialize in one or the other kind of plant according to their preference or the suitability of their growing facilities. Retail garden stores generally display annuals in one place, perhaps a bit more sheltered, and perennials in another place more open to the weather. Vegetable plants have a very short sales season compared to the others, and really need shelter, so a garden store displays them still differently. Shrubs and trees are usually grown by an entirely different group of growers, in very different conditions. At garden centers they get put way outside - in the cold and rain, or blazing sun, depending on the time of year. It's easy to see why a garden shopper might think, consciously or unconsciously, that these various plants should remain separated when they come home with them. So we tend to see beds of all perennials, mass plantings of annuals, and stiff, green shrub beds un-livened by the variety of color and form found in herbaceous plants. And the vegetable garden is hidden in an unlovely corner by nearly everyone except a few free-thinkers who would never be accepted into any community with a Home Owners' Association.

A blended garden spreads out the bloom time, giving you more months of pleasure. An all-shrub-and-tree garden can be lovely in spring, but hardly any shrubs bloom in late summer – not much besides Rose of Sharon, Crape Myrtle, and re-blooming varieties of Hydrangea. Add some perennials and you get a big flush of color in May and especially June, when most shrubs and flowering trees are about done. Quite a few perennials come into bloom fresh for late summer, but their numbers have shrunk since July. That's when the annuals shine, reaching their full size and color in late summer and fall, filling in the gaps where the early perennials have been trimmed back to green foliage clumps. And the vegetable plants, if you choose to bring them out of their corner, are at their prime. Fuzzy purple eggplants with lavender blooms and purple or white fruits, shiny pepper plants, dramatically rugged artichokes, and stately, tasseled corn can be attractive additions to your plantings. Even red-foiled beets and colored-stemmed Swiss chard are nice color splashes among the chopped-off perennials and green shrubs of September.

A blended garden is also a more natural creation, and better serves as a bird, bee, and butterfly habitat. Here in the mid-Willamette Valley we feel like habitat loss should not be a problem, but the large farm fields around us may actually leave wildlife hungry at certain stages of development. Since we'd rather not invite deer, raccoons, gophers and possums in to our yards to feed, let's concentrate on birds, bees and butterflies, especially the pollinators. A garden that provides blooming plants from early spring through fall is the best food for pollinators. Early bloomers are mostly shrubs, except for the Hellebores and Heathers, both favorites of bees. Oregon Grape and Red Flowering Currant come along next in the shrubs, soon followed by fruit trees of all kinds. Then the early perennials like Candytuft and Rockcress join in – and don't mow those dandelions in the lawn until the bees have had their fill – pluck them just before they go to seed. Or leave

the seeds for the goldfinches. No guilt, it's for the good of the environment. (Again, no Home Owners' Assoc. for you.) The whole spring flush of perennials gets blooming in May, and we plant the first baby annuals among them. Alyssum is a classic front edging and one of the best honeybee feeders around. Zinnias, Nicotianas and Heliotropes can gradually gain height in the mid- to-back areas between perennials to add their blooms all summer. Basil and fennel, and the aforementioned peppers and eggplants can be planted in sunny spaces between shrubs, along with mounding trailing Verbenas which are favorites of all kinds of pollinators. June and July bring many more perennials including Bee Balm (Monarda) Lavender, Echinacea, and Butterfly Weed (Asclepias). August carries on with Black-Eyed Susans (Rudbeckia), Asters and Bluebeard (Caryopteris) and all kinds of Salvias in the perennials, and an increasing amount of annuals. Fall finishes off with the Zinnias, Verbenas and other annuals, especially good old Nicotiana hanging on to the bitter end in November most years.

To make the best feeding grounds for foraging pollinators and seed-gathering birds, plant your perennials in good-sized groups. This means, of course, that your lawn space keeps getting smaller and smaller. That's alright. Lawn doesn't benefit any wildlife except human children who need a level soft place to play. Pollinators also need a wide range of flower sizes and shapes in order to appeal to all the different little creatures doing the job. Mix the spikes of tubular flowers like Salvias, Lavenders and others in the Mint family, with flat headed flowers like Bee Balm and Yarrow, and daisy types like Echinaceas, Shastas, and Black-Eyed Susans, and Asters. A mixture of colors, at all times if possible, also attracts and thus supports a wider range of bees, birds and butterflies. The little wild creatures who help us grow our food and give us so much pleasure to watch will all appreciate an increase in garden diversity.

## Egan Gardens

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Open first weekend of March through July  
Mon-Sat. 9 am to 6 pm, Sun 10 am to 5 pm  
August 1 to mid- October  
Mon-Sat. 9 am to 5 pm, Sun 10 am to 5 pm