

Practical Mixed Borders

I. The mixed border, defined:

- A. Beds that contain plants from three or more of the major classes (trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, biennials, bulbs).
- B. The various classes are used as "equals," not corralled separately.
- C. Usually applied to one-sided beds, not islands.

II. Why and where are mixed borders used?

- A. Trees and shrubs add quick size, for balance with huge backgrounds.
- B. Maximum interest in all seasons:
 1. Winter interest.
 2. Extended bloom, both early and late.

III. Mixed borders present design challenges (opportunities!)

- A. Balancing extreme size differences.
- B. Deciding whether to crowd plants requires extra consideration.
- C. As you develop the design, check the seasonal balance and flow:
 1. It's not just whether "something" is blooming/interesting but how much visual weight it carries.
 2. Each focal point group might be multi-seasonal in interest.
 3. If focal point groups are strongly seasonal, mix the groups carefully.
 4. It's the best garden type for four season interest:
 - Begin in winter. Choose plants/features for shape/texture/bark.
 - Place distinctive focal points. Avoid tight spacing.
 - Drop in spring near winter. Don't be spring-heavy.
 - Mass bulbs in irregular groups. Use their foliage.
 - Blend in summer. Think: annuals and *late bloom* perennials.
 - Brush in fall, leaf color/seed pods/motion before flower
- D. A need to "double-up" around ephemerals and brief-interest plants:
 1. Combine plants so one comes on to mask another's exit.
 2. Use masking plants with "skirts" or delayed emergence.
 3. Yet minimize use of brief-season and flower-only plants.

IV. Planting and maintenance issues in the mixed border

A. Staggered plantings often necessary.

B. Access for the caretaker is always tricky.

C. The referee has to be firm and crafty:

1. Some plant species are not compatible in terms of aggression.
2. Perennials that need frequent dividing can be a liability
 - Select for low or lower care.
3. Deadheading, cutting back and thinning are never-ending
4. Pruning: Tree/shrub counterpart to dividing and thinning

D. Annuals and biennials

1. Plan -- and maintain -- space for annuals.
2. Remember to preserve visual equality of plant types. For instance, there's no place for annual "ring around the perennials."
3. Some annuals can be expected to self-sow: Requires true-from-seed species/varieties, no mulch, a critical eye, and thinning.
4. Biennials a "plus" but a bit trickier to work with than annuals.

E. Fertilizing different plant groups

F. Staking and miscellaneous issues

Tried-and-true Strategy for Continuous Color: The Mixed Border

Listed here in visually attractive perennial groups by habitat. Each group makes use of shapes, textures, foliage colors, colors and forms of flowers as well as bloom season.

Perennials are listed in order of bloom within each group. Shrubs, vines, annuals and bulbs accompany each group: shrubs for background and body in winter, vines for verticality and surprise, annuals for those who *must* have bloom every day of the growing season, and bulbs (+) where they can be tucked in.

Full sun

pasqueflower: *Anemone pulsatilla* (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*)

basket of gold (Alyssum 'Sulphureum')+
zebra iris: *Iris pallida argenteo-variegata* (*I. germanica variegata*)

purpleleaf beardtongue: *Penstemon* 'Husker Red'
and other cv's

threadleaf coreopsis: *C. verticillata*

spike veronica: *Veronica subsessilis*

gaillardia, blanket flower: *Gaillardia grandiflora*

blackberry lily: *Belamcanda* spp., x *Pardancanda norrisii*

butterfly bush: *Buddleia davidii*++

tall stonecrop, Autumn Joy: *Sedum spectabile*
(*Telekium spectabile*)

purple bush clover: *Lespedeza* spp.

Full sun - Shrubs, Vines, Annuals, +Bulbs

dwarf lilac (*Syringa microphylla* cv.)

forsythia

late clematis (*C. viticella*, *C. texensis*)

ageratum / flossflower: *Ageratum houstonianum*

marigold: *Tagetes patula*

petunia: *Petunia multiflora*

salvia: *Salvia splendens*, *S. farinacea*

snapdragon: *Antirrhinum majus*

++any/all spring-blooming perennial bulbs

+Peruvian lily

Dry, sunny areas - Perennials

cushion spurge: *Euphorbia polychroma*
Potentilla, herbaceous clump forming spp.
lavender: *Lavandula angustifolia*
pinks: *Dianthus* spp.
sea kale: *Crambe maritima*
mullein: *Verbascum* hybrids
agastache: *Agastache* hybrids
lambs ear: *Stachys officinalis*
purple coneflower: *Echinacea purpurea*, *E. pallida*
pearly everlasting: *Anaphalis* spp.

Dry, sunny areas - Shrubs, Vines, Annuals, +Bulbs

blue mist spirea (*Caryopteris x clandonensis*)+
smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria*)
large-flowered clematis
cosmos: *Cosmos bipinnatus*
dusty miller: *Senecio cineraria*
globe amaranth: *Gomphrena globosa*
moss rose: *Portulaca grandiflora*
strawflower: *Helichrysum bracteatum*
+species tulips (*T. turkestanica*, *T. praestans*)

Sun, constantly moist to poorly drained - Perennials

globeflower: *Trollius* spp.
Siberian iris: *Iris sibirica*
border jewel: *Polygonum affine*
meadowsweet, queen of the meadow, queen of the
prairie: *Filipendula* spp.
goldenrod: *Solidago* spp., clump-forming
prairie dock: *Silphium terebinthinaceum*, other
Silphium spp.
Joe Pye: *Eupatorium purpureum*
hardy hibiscus: *Hibiscus moscheutos*

Sun, constantly moist to poorly drained - Shrubs,

Vines, Annuals, +Bulbs

redtwig dogwood (*Cornus a. elegantissima*)+
Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)
elderberry (*Sambucus* varieties)
canna: *Canna* hybrids
lantana: *Lantana* hybrids
+quamash (*Camassia* varieties)

Full sun in Clay soil - Perennials

catmint: *Nepeta* spp. and hybrids
gas plant, burning bush: *Dictamnus albus*
daylily: *Hemerocallis* varieties
false sunflower: *Heliopsis scabra*
blackeye Susan: *Rudbeckia* 'Goldsturm'
perennial sunflower: *Helianthus x multiflorus*
Aster spp. and dwarf hybrids

Full sun in clay soil - Shrubs, Vines, Annuals

bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*)
perennial sweet pea (*Lathyrus latifolius*)#
trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*)#
creeping zinnia: *Sanvitalia procumbens*
million bells: *Callibrachoa* cv's
spiderflower: *Cleome hasslerana*
sunflower: *Helianthus* cv's
= Don't blame me when it runs amok!

Half shade - Perennials

leopardsbane: *Doronicum caucasicum*
foamflower: *Tiarella cordifolia*
fringed bleeding heart: *Dicentra eximia*
bluestar: *Amsonia tabernaemontana*, *A. hubrechtii*
lady's mantle: *Alchemilla mollis*
goatsbeard: *Aruncus* spp.
masterwort: *Astrantia* spp.
bellflower: *Campanula*, short spp.
meadow rue: *Thalictrum* spp.
Culver's root: *Veronicastrum virginicum*
coral bells, alum root: *Heuchera* cv's
Japanese anemone: *Anemone japonica* (*A. hybrida*)+

Half shade - Shrubs, Vines, Annuals, +Bulbs

seven son shrub (*Heptacodium micinoides*)
oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*)++
goldflame honeysuckle (*Lonicera Heckrottii*)
Browallia cv's
edging lobelia: *Lobelia erinus*
heliotrope: *Heliotropum* cv's
monkey flower: *Mimulus* hybrids
periwinkle: *Catharanthus roseus*
+summer snowflake (*Leucojum* 'Gravetye')
++bluebells (*Campanulata scillioides*)
(++)Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)

Shade - Perennials

Lenten rose: *Helleborus x orientalis*
black mondo grass (*Ophiopogon p. "Nigrescens"*)
baneberry, esp. red b.: *Actaea rubra*
golden bleeding heart: *Corydalis lutea*
variegated Solomon's seal: *Polygonatum odoratum variegatum*
non-invasive ferns: (painted; leatherwood)
Hosta spp.
lilyturf, variegated: *Liriope muscari variegata*
blue bush clematis: *Clematis h. davidiana*
Japanese wax bell: *Kirengeshoma palmata*
toadlily: *Tricyrtis hirta*+

Shade - Shrubs, Vines, Annuals

European elder (*Sambucus racemosa*)
Ural false spirea (*Sorbaria sorbifolia*)
variegated porcelain vine (*Ampelopsis b variegata*)
climbing hydrangea (*H. anomala petiolaris*)
coleus: *Coleus* hybrids
impatiens: *Impatiens* cv's
wishbone flower: *Torenia*
+Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)

Dry shade - Perennials

bishop's hat: *Epimedium x rubrum*
starry false Solomon's seal: *Smilacina stellata*
bigleaf forget me not: *Brunnera macrophylla*
perennial geranium: *Geranium* spp.
tellima: *Tellima grandiflora*

Dry shade - Shrubs, Annuals

deutzia (*D. gracilis 'Nikko'*)
polka dot- / aluminum plant (*Hypoestes*)

Moist to wet shade - Perennials

Christmas fern: *Polystichum acrostichoides*
roger's- / finger flower: *Rodgersia* spp.
fairycandle, snakeroot, bugbane: *Cimicifuga* spp.
leopardplant, gold groundsel: *Ligularia* spp.
Astilbe spp. and cv's
turtlehead: *Chelone obliqua* (C. lyonii)

Moist to wet shade - Annuals

spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)
summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*)
caladium: *Caladium* cv's
wax begonia