

Great Perennial Combinations

The best of the best perennials can still be better in well planned combos

I. The basic elements of "best"

If it's not the right plant for the site, it simply cannot be great.

Given: If it impressed you in photo, description or sight, it's *healthy*.

Seasonal color: Wonderful to see but it's just one of many landscape features.

Flower color lasts only 1 to 4 weeks.

Long-blooming species may add 2 - 3 weeks, usually require more care.

A repeat blooming plant's 2nd show is no match for its main season.

So grant the flower power but make the leaf chief and don't stint on other tints!

All greens are not equal! Their differences are most apparent in combination.

Variegated and colorful-foliage varieties carry the summer show.

Spring leaf-out and fall change of color: As long lasting and predictable as bloom.

Seedstalks and persistent foliage can be spectacular.

Evergreens fill winter, our longest season of interest.

Leaf size and form play an important role in combinations.

Plant form / habit/ shape: More powerful and enduring than color alone.

Even at dusk and dawn, the outlines show -- and glow.

Spires/columns/ pyramidal forms arrest attention.

Don't overdo them.

Mounded, spreading/ vase and carpet forms give flow and stability.

Some forms neat, regular; others more irregular.

If you prune, enhance the natural shape, don't fight it.

Distinct differences in plant height adds drama to a combination of shapes.

Space is often essential for showcasing plant form. Don't crowd!



Textural combinations give a landscape deep, rich dimension.

Texture is the visual pattern of light and shadow on the surface and outline of an object. Put on your black-and-white glasses to see texture.

Coarse texture is bold pattern, large distinct light and dark areas. Polka dots!

Fine texture is a close weave, subtle light-dark pattern. Tweed!

Medium texture is somewhere between coarsest and finest companion items.

Texture is always relative. Hosta may be coarse until bigleaf magnolia added.

Texture may differ between leafy and leafless seasons.

Where to gather ideas, beyond today's presentation:

Resources that list plants by site or provide detailed info about cultural needs --

Perennials and Their Garden Habitat, Richard Hansen & Friedrich Stahl

Perennial Reference Guide, Karleen Shafer & Nicole Lloyd Stipes Publ. 2007

The Specialty Growers Catalog!

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II. Building a great combo.

"Best" plants are under our noses. Start with one suited to the site. Build on that!

Yew, crabapple, burning bush, dwarf spirea, arborvitae... they're common for good reason! So don't start from scratch, build on existing steady-eddy's.

Step one, fill in the blanks for plant number one (_____):

- Get specific about its colors and times of --
Bloom _____
Leaf-out or emergence of new greenery _____
Summer leaf color _____
Fall leaf color _____
Winter leaf color _____
Berries / seed pods _____
Bark color _____
- State its natural or gardener-enforced shape (_____)
And its size (be realistic!) (ht. _____ width _____)
- Determine its texture, relative to most plants (_____)

Step two, pick a companion suited to the same site (_____):

Identify its other characteristics (same as for plant #1)

Assess the two plants' compatibilities.

Figure how many of each is necessary for the two to be equal in mass or one to be star, other to be chorus line.

Step three, pick one or two more companions for that site (_____):

Identify its/their other characteristics (as for plant #1)

Assess how this/these plants' will impact the 1-2 combination.

Figure how many of each is necessary for these additional plants to be added as chorus line members.

Step four, note the seasonal gaps, if any.

	Win	Mar	Apr	May	Jn	Jl	Aug	Sept	Oct/Nov
Plant 1 _____									
Plant 2 _____									
Plant 3 _____									
Plant 4 _____									

Every combination gives you pointers to "Where next":

Make it a priority to fill an existing combo's gaps in your *next* combo.

Great Plant Combinations for Continuous Color

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*) (1)

basket of gold (*Alyssum 'Sulphureum'*)+ (2)

zebra iris: *Iris pallida argenteo-variegata* (*I. germanica variegata*) (3)

purpleleaf beardtongue: *Penstemon 'Husker Red'* and other cv's (4)

threadleaf coreopsis: *C. verticillata* (5)

spike veronica: *Veronica subsessilis* (6)

gaillardia, blanket flower: *Gaillardia grandiflora* (7)

blackberry lily: *Belamcanda* spp., *x Pardancanda norrisii* (8)

butterfly bush: *Buddleia davidii*++ (9)

tall stonecrop, Autumn Joy: *Sedum spectabile* (*Telekium spectabile*) (10)

purple bush clover: *Lespedeza* spp. (11)

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*

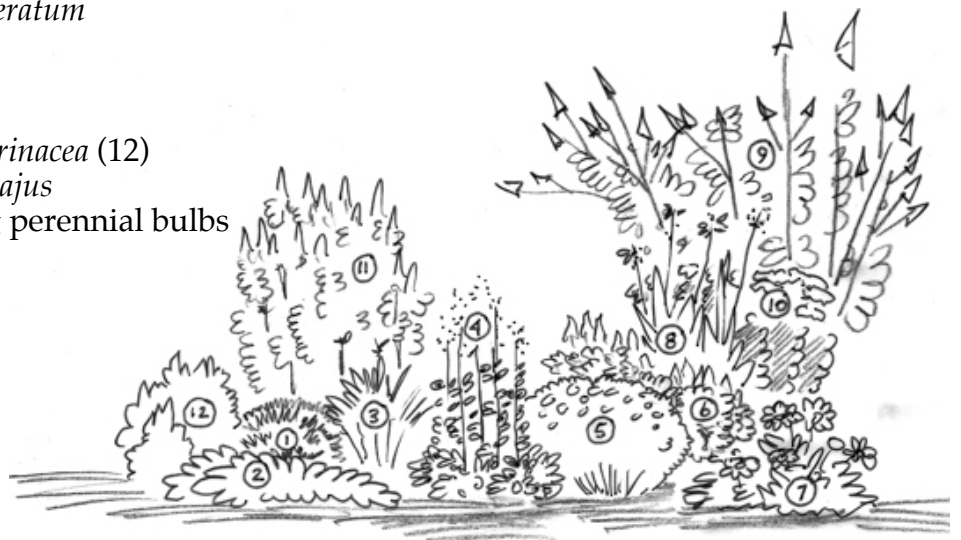
petunia: *Petunia multiflora*

salvia: *Salvia splendens*, *S. farinacea* (12)

snapdragon: *Antirrhinum majus*

++any / all spring-blooming perennial bulbs

+Peruvian lily



Dry, sunny areas - Perennials

cushion spurge: *Euphorbia polychroma* (1)
Potentilla, herbaceous clump forming spp. (2)
lavender: *Lavandula angustifolia* (3)
pinks: *Dianthus* spp. (4)
sea kale: *Crambe maritima* (5)
mullein: *Verbascum* hybrids (6)
agastache: *Agastache* hybrids
lambs ear: *Stachys officinalis*
purple coneflower: *Echinacea purpurea*,
E. pallida (7)
pearly everlasting: *Anaphalis* spp. (8)



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

blue mist spirea (*Caryopteris x clandonensis*)+
smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygia*)
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. (1)
Siberian iris: *Iris sibirica* (3)
border jewel: *Polygonum affine* (2)
meadowsweet, queen of the meadow,
queen of the prairie: *Filipendula* spp.
goldenrod: *Solidago* spp., clump-
forming (4)
prairie dock: *Silphium terebinthinaceum*,
other *Silphium* spp. (5)
Joe Pye: *Eupatorium purpureum* (6)
hardy hibiscus: *Hibiscus moscheutos* (7)

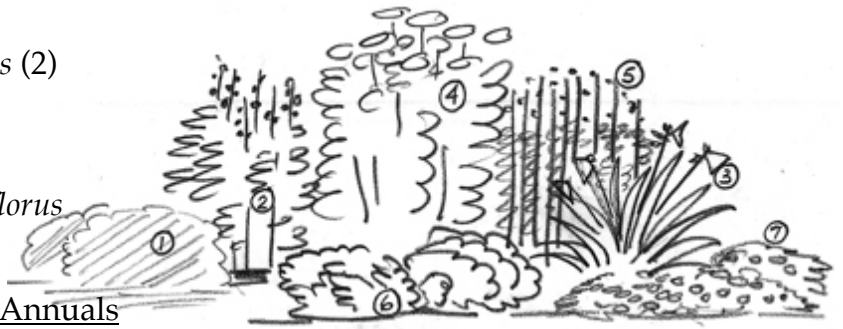


Sun, constantly moist to poorly drained -
Shrubs, Vines, Annuals, +Bulbs

redtwig dogwood (*Cornus a. elegantissima*)+
Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)
elderberry (*Sambucus* varieties)
canna: *Canna* hybrids
lantana: *Lantana* hybrids (8)
+quamash (*Camassia* varieties)

Full sun in Clay soil - Perennials

catmint: *Nepeta* spp. and hybrids (1)
gas plant, burning bush: *Dictamnus albus* (2)
daylily: *Hemerocallis* varieties (3)
false sunflower: *Heliopsis scabra* (5)
blackeye Susan: *Rudbeckia* 'Goldsturm'
perennial sunflower: *Helianthus x multiflorus*
Aster spp. and dwarf hybrids (6)



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* (7)
million bells: *Callibrachoa* cv's
spiderflower: *Cleome hasslerana*
sunflower: *Helianthus* cv's (4)
= Don't blame me when it runs amok!

Half shade - Perennials

leopardsbane: *Doronicum caucasicum* (1)
foamflower: *Tiarella cordifolia* (2)
fringed bleeding heart: *Dicentra eximia* (3)
bluestar: *Amsonia tabernaemontana*, *A. hubrechtii* (4)
lady's mantle: *Alchemilla mollis* (5)
goatsbeard: *Aruncus* spp. (6)
masterwort: *Astrantia* spp.
bellflower: *Campanula*, short spp. (7)
meadow rue: *Thalictrum* spp. (8)
Culver's root: *Veronicastrum virginicum* (9)
coral bells, alum root: *Heuchera* cv's (10)
Japanese anemone: *Anemone japonica* (*A. hybrida*)+

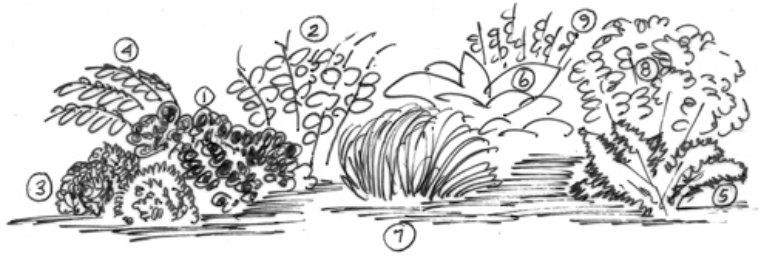


Half shade - Shrubs, Vines, Annuals, +Bulbs

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* (1)
black mondo grass (*Ophiopogon p.*
"Nigrescens")
baneberry, esp. red b.: *Actaea rubra* (2)
golden bleeding heart: *Corydalis lutea* (3)
variegated Solomon's seal: *Polygonatum*
odoratum variegatum (4)
non-invasive ferns: (painted (5); leatherwood)
Hosta spp. (6)
lilyturf, variegated: *Liriope muscari variegata* (7)
blue bush clematis: *Clematis h. davidiana* (8)
Japanese wax bell: *Kirengeshoma palmata* (9)
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* (3)
bigleaf forget me not: *Brunnera macrophylla* (1)
perennial geranium: *Geranium* spp.
tellima: *Tellima grandiflora* (2)



Dry shade - Shrubs, Annuals

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

Moist to wet shade - Perennials

Christmas fern: *Polystichum acrostichoides* (1)
roger's- / finger flower: *Rodgersia* spp. (2)
fairycandle, snakeroot, bugbane: *Cimicifuga* spp.
leopardplant, gold groundsel: *Ligularia* spp.
Astilbe spp. and cv's (3)
turtlehead: *Chelone obliqua* (C. lyonii) (4)



Moist to wet shade - Annuals

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