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Inspection of the Troops



image of weeping spruce (Picea abies 'Pendula') photograph by Rob Cardillo at Chanticleer, Wayne, Pa.





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Colorful Quick Fixes

So much more than just "a pretty shade of pink," color can be one of the most powerful elements in your garden. Playing many different roles, color can fix a wide range of everyday problems. If your garden seems out of control, uninviting or just plain boring, selecting the right combination of colors can often be the solution.



Color as the Director

Creating a garden can be compared to producing a play: hardscaping is the set, plants are the cast of characters and color is the director. As the director, color must effectively lead the audience from one scene to the next. For example, even though your garden may have a pathway leading from point A to point B,

that doesn't necessarily mean someone will want to explore it. You need something to entice that person along, gently hinting that something wonderful lies beyond. To create that "Yoohoo! Over here!" effect, try using a bold color to catch the eve.

In the above photo, notice the generous use of marooncolored plants throughout the garden, adding much needed visual warmth and interest. However, it's the dark and moody Japanese maple (Acer palmatum 'Bloodgood'; USDA Zones 5-9) peeking around the corner that seems to be waving the white hankie, beckoning one to explore a little further.

Color as the Peacemaker

I'll be the first to admit that sometimes my best efforts in combining colors can go awry. What seems like a great idea at the nursery doesn't always translate well in the garden. If a color isn't quite the right shade, the result can be a jarring color combination. If this has happened to you, don't be too quick to rip out the offending plant. Sometimes it's as simple as adding another color or two to help calm the chaos.

In the photo at top right, notice the lack of harmony between the pink tones of the mirror plant (Coprosma repens 'Pink Splendor'; Zones 9-11) and the steely blue of the blue oat grass (Helictotrichon sempervirens: Zones 4-9). To fix this visual argument, the two troublemakers are surrounded by soothing greens, purples and magentas, visible in the wider shot at right.



Color has the ability to draw visitors deeper into a garden (opposite page); make peace between other colors (left and below); and raise or lower the visual temperature of a scene, contributing to the overall mood (bottom).





Color as the Mood Changer

When you're deciding on the mood of your garden. remember that colors have temperatures. Some are hot and feverish, adding a jolt of excitement and energy to your garden. Some are cool and calming, having the effect of a glass of wine at the end of a long day. Colors' temperatures create the mood and atmosphere of a garden.

For example, at left, the peach and coral of the coral bells (Heuchera 'Peach Flambe'; Zones 4-9) and cushion spurge (Euphorbia 'Blackbird'; Zones 6-9) add an important shot of warmth in this otherwise cool garden, raising the visual temperature and adding interest.

Experiment with color in various combinations to give your garden the look and mood you desire. &

Garden designer REBECCA SWEET co-wrote Garden Up! Smart Vertical Gardening for Small and Large Spaces. For more about her and to read her blog, Gossip in the Garden, visit harmonyinthegarden.com.