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## A continuous cascade of color



A little planning can result in enjoying blooms spring through fall.

Excitement builds each spring as tiny darts of color split green buds, hinting at what will surely be a marvelous and joyful display of vibrant color in flowerbeds and gardens. All too commonly, blooms fade as spring wears on, leaving a bland void of lackluster foliage where color once prevailed. This garden tragedy can be avoided. With a little research and planning, blooms can be a constant presence from early spring through late fall.

“People tend to go to the nurseries in May and June and buy the plants that look great at that time of year,” says Lee Schneller, garden designer and author of *The Ever-Blooming Flower Garden: A Blueprint for Continuous Color*. “They fill their gardens with those plants, then come August they haven’t got any color and their gardens are drab.”

Drab is certainly never the goal for space meant to elevate spirits and wow guests and passersby. Rather than impulse buying come spring, Schneller suggests taking stock of current plants, making a list, and heading to the nursery with a plan.

### Charting Success

With existing plants and planned purchases, gardeners should aim to assemble a good mix of plants in all the following categories: short, medium, and tall plants; foliage plants; and plants blooming in spring, early summer, midsummer, late summer, and fall.

Schneller painstakingly gathered her own data on bloom timing and longevity, but notes good information is now available from various resources from the local nursery to regional botanical gardens. When making her shopping lists, she uses a chart to make sure she hits all the boxes. The chart has height categories forming the columns along the top of the page and foliage and bloom time making up the intersecting rows. A good spread of plants across each square creates a balance of season-long blooms.

“My criteria for choosing plants are those that are low maintenance, bloom a long time, and have good foliage,” she says. “I want foliage that looks good all season, even when the plant’s not blooming.”

For affordability and longevity, she creates her gardens using mainly perennial plants. “You can’t beat an annual for color. They’re bred to push out blossoms and die. But that can be a lot of

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expense and extra work,” Schneller says. She also tries to avoid plants that spread too much.

## Color Scheme

Color is another major consideration. Schneller advises choosing a palette and sticking with it. Color groupings that work well together are blue, soft yellow and white; purple, yellow and deep red; or pink, purple, blue, and white. Gardeners should avoid mixing powder blue or pink with reds and yellows.

With palette in hand, the gardener can get to painting. When organizing gardens, Schneller takes two approaches. One is to spread blooms evenly across the entire bed. “If you have a 16-foot bed and 10 flowers that bloom in June, just scatter them relatively evenly across the bed making sure to zigzag to avoid creating undesirable lines,” she says.

A more satisfying approach, in Schneller’s opinion, is creating clusters of plants that will bloom together. For example, one could cluster together June-blooming plants such as a peony, some Siberian irises and delphinium at one end of the bed and another cluster of June-blooming plants at the opposite end of the bed. The rest of the bed will be filled with the green foliage of plants set to bloom together later. “If you have too many blooms spread all over, the eye just bounces around. This design gives your eye a place to land and enjoy the beauty,” she says.

Plants of varying heights can be used to layer in blooms. For those wishing to use all three heights, Schneller recommends a bed be at least 6-feet deep. “You need depth for it to be comfortable. You don’t want it to look like a steep bank. It needs room to build,” she says.

## Putting Down Roots

All plants should be purchased and planted in spring if possible. “Take your list and resist the urge to buy what’s in bloom!” Schneller says. For best results, she recommends starting with an empty flowerbed. If there’s an existing flowerbed, all plants to be included in the new garden should be dug up and set aside in individual bags or oversized plastic pots. “If you leave existing plants in place they tend to overwhelm new plants,” she says. Replanting everything puts all plants on the same page for establishment.

Placing plants is mostly gut feeling for Schneller. She simply takes all the plants and sets them around the space in their containers until it feels right. Tall, medium, and short stakes and colored flags can help keep track of plant height and bloom time since many of the plants are still just vegetation. She ignores plant spacing recommendations. “I really pack them in. This results in getting the maximum blossoms per square foot of garden, cuts down on weeds, and helps inhibit plants that tend to spread, which cuts down on maintenance,” she says.

A person can run the risk of getting bogged down planning a continuously blooming garden, but

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Schneller encourages people to just roll with it.

“I want people to boldly go into their gardens and have fun with it,” she says. “Don’t get too worried about if it will come out perfectly. But, a little planning will go a long way toward making a successful and really satisfying garden that will last for years and years.”

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