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## A Color Primer

Looking at a blooming plant what is the first thing you notice? If you're like most of us, you notice the color of the bloom. Color is typically the most attention-getting feature of any plant - which means the use of color can make or break a garden design.

Let's start with a quick review of color theory (remember the color wheel?).

Colors are divided into 4 categories:

- Primary: reds, yellows and blues
- Secondary: greens, violets (purples) and oranges. Produced by blending two primary colors: red and yellow create orange, yellow and blue create green, and red and blue create purple.
- Tertiary: Blends of the primary and secondary categories (yellow-orange, yellow-green and blue-violet).
- Neutral: Whites, grays and silvers.

- Complementary colors are opposite each other on the color wheel (red/green, orange/blue, yellow/purple). These colors contrast with each other.

- Harmonious colors are next to each other on the color wheel. These colors share some value, blending well together in a color scheme.



So- how does this apply to your landscape? Color is important in creating a desired mood, the perception of space, attracting attention to a specific area, and blending together different areas of your yard.



The mood of a garden varies depending on the colors you choose. Cool colors (blue, purple and green) are soothing while warm colors (red, yellow and orange) are exciting. A garden for relaxing in with a good book will use plants that bloom in cool blues and purples, blending with neutrals and perhaps soft shades of pinks. A garden for rousing the viewer to attention will use plants that bloom in red, yellow and orange with some complementary blues and purples artfully thrown in.

A viewer's perception of space can be altered by color. In a small space, choose cool colors to make the space feel larger. Warm colors will make a large space feel more intimate.



Warm colors are best for creating a focal point because they'll grab the viewer's attention, drawing the eye to that particular spot.

Repeating a color in separate garden beds will visually tie the beds together and unite your entire yard.

Here are a few "themes" to start you thinking about how to best use color in your designs:

#### HARMONIOUS COMBINATIONS:

1. Monochromatic: choose one color and use it in all its various shades. This can be a good choice for beginners because it avoids the use of too many colors.
2. Analogous: choose just 2 – 3 colors that are adjacent to each other on the color wheel. By limiting your color choices you're less likely to accidentally create unpleasant combinations.



#### CONTRASTING COMBINATIONS:

1. Complementary: select two colors opposite each other on the color wheel to create contrast. Avoid too much contrast by favoring one color and using the other as an accent.
2. Polychromatic: don't worry about any rules and use any and all colors! Be bold but be careful the garden doesn't become too chaotic.