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## Get down and dirty

Spring is here and the planting bug has bitten a large number of area residents. Al Lind of the Centerville Greenhouse said the best time for landscaping is the spring and fall - especially for planting bulbs, shrubs and trees.

Lind said that by keeping a lawn robust and free of weeds through fertilizers and herbicides, no weeds will appear when mowing is cut back during dry spells.



There are also a number of natural ways to maintain the health of a lawn. For tips on ways to feed grass and control weeds and pests without using chemicals, go to the Web site: [local-motion.org/greengrass.html](http://local-motion.org/greengrass.html).

Lind said it is also important to “stay on top of the game” through continual care, even if it is only a couple minutes weekdays pulling weeds - which will free up your weekends.

Other ways of preventing weeds in flower beds include the use of mulch or fabric covered with rocks, he says.



“By July, the summer has taken its toll on plants,” Lind observed. “During those dry times, water at least two to three times a week. Spot watering with a wand conserves water, but a sprinkler is easy and really soaks the area.”

Greenhouses like the one in Centerville, Lind said, also offer selections of drought-tolerant plants and staff that can offer help in planning a landscape.

A tip when planting shrubs and trees, says Lind, it to have a “\$10 hole for a \$5 tree” - meaning dig the hole twice as big as the root ball, which allows the tree to more easily establish a good root system.

For annual and perennial flowers, he advises also working the soil for easier starts for root systems. If the soil is not that healthy, he advises adding better soil.

“As the years go by,” said Lind, “the area works up easier and easier.”

## Using color in your landscaping

Ann Marie VanDerZanden

Horticulturist - Iowa State University

Gardeners know that color is an important part of every landscape composition. However, the many dimensions and classifications of color make it a complex design element. A result of this complexity is that color is often overused or poorly used. When color is used well, and some simple guidelines are followed, it can be a striking part of the landscape and create a sense of unity throughout the entire design.



Color should be considered when selecting both plants and hardscapes (e.g. patios, decks, walkways, arbors). However, color associated with plants, unlike hardscapes, often changes during the growing season. For example, some flowering crabapple varieties appear burgundy when the new leaves emerge in the spring; bright pink when in flower; green in the summer; and bronze in the fall. Once again, adding to the complexity of using color in the landscape. Although annual and perennial flowers can provide a lot of the color, don't overlook the flowers of trees, shrubs and vines. In addition to flowers, the foliage of these plants can also be a valuable addition to a gardener's color palette.

My garden column this month will focus on three basic approaches to using color. Although most of my comments will focus on color selection in relation to plants, the color of hardscapes and other elements in the garden should also be considered. The first approach to selection color is to use a monochromatic theme. It may sound dull to some gardeners, but it can actually make the landscape awash in subtle variations of a single hue. A second approach is to use analogous colors, or those colors adjacent to each other on the color wheel. A third approach is to use complementary colors which are color pairs located opposite each other on the color wheel.

Monochromatic color schemes use one color with the full range of values from the darkest to the lightest shades. A blue scheme, for example, might include a range from a soft blue to a deep navy. A red scheme could include plants with the palest pink to the deepest burgundy. Although the changes from one shade to the next tend to be slight, including the whole range of shades provides a lot of visual interest and can make for a stunning garden.

A good rule to follow when creating a monochromatic garden is to create plant masses of different sizes, depending on the lightness or darkness of the color. In order for the lighter colors to provide adequate visual mass in the composition, more light color plants are needed in comparison to the darker colors. By increasing the number of plants in the mass by one third as the color lightens, the desired visual effect can be achieved. For example, if the colors range from pink to pinkish-red to burgundy, use nine pink-flowered plants, six pinkish-red flowered plants, and three burgundy flowered plants. Obviously this is just a starting point and the number of plants used may need to be modified.

As mentioned earlier analogous colors are those located next to each other on the color wheel. Analogous combinations have subtle visual differences, and the colors tend to blend from one to the other. An example would be a planting composition that includes red, orange, yellow, and the array of shades for each of these hues.

Often the analogous concept is combined with warm and cool color classifications. Warm colors include reds, oranges and yellows; cool colors include blues, greens and violets. The warm colors tend to be bright and very visible in the landscape. Because these colors are so vivid, fewer plants can be used in a mass to achieve visual impact. The cooler colors tend to recede into the landscape and be more subtle. Larger plant masses of these colors are needed in order to achieve the desired visual effect.

Complementary color pairs are located opposite each other on the wheel. Examples include yellow and purple, red and green, and blue and orange. Complementary color combinations create a great deal of visual contrast in a landscape and seldom have a subtle effect in the overall planting. They can be used throughout the landscape to create a theme, or as a focal point to draw attention. In order to keep a consistent theme within the design I suggest using only one of the complementary pairs at a time. However, by using pale yellow with light lavender and bright yellows with deep purples there will still be plenty of color to enjoy.

Color can be a beautiful addition to a landscape design. As you begin thinking about your landscape this spring, consider my suggestions when making your color choices. And, don't be afraid to experiment with a couple of new color ideas in your garden each year.

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