

Flowers Ain't Everything!

At its best, gardening is an art form. Unfortunately some gardeners, particularly new ones, concentrate almost exclusively on flowers. Color provided by flowers is a major design element but experienced gardeners also work (consciously or not) with line, form, texture, sound and scent. When I started gardening almost 70 years ago I didn't know what weed from Shinola, but over the decades I've learned a few things. In building my gardens, I have moved plants a lot to try for pleasing combinations and to get leaf and flower timing right.

Flowers are fleeting, but foliage lasts much longer and comes in a great variety of colors and textures. Sometimes, foliage color changes during the year for added interest. Japanese maples are famous for changeable foliage--not just fall color. "Beni Maiko" and "Shindeshojo" are standout maples with bright red new growth that changes to green in summer. There are many other maples that have changing foliage.



Shindeshoho

Pieris japonica has several varieties with brilliant new foliage to rival any flowers. "Flaming Silver" has bright scarlet new growth that fades to pink, then to cream/ivory and ends up green with white margins. The white flowers are a side show. *Pieris* "Katsura" has shiny burgundy new growth fading to green with pink flowers.



Pieris Flaming Silver



Pieris Katsura



Cornus “Mid-Winter Fire” is a shrub dogwood that has brilliant winter bark and many other dogwood varieties have variegated foliage. A standout for variegated foliage is a new kousa dogwood called “Summer Gold.” It has green leaves edged in gold. In the fall the green leaf center turns burgundy and the gold remains. Striking!



Midwinter Fire



Summer Gold Dogwood

And then there are hostas—easy to grow, come in many colors and textures, and a variety of sizes. My favorite is hosta “June.” The leaf edges are clear smoky blue and the centers are gold infused with blue. “June” is *uber*-cool in a genus with many beautiful varieties.



Line, form and texture are other important design elements. Of course, you can prune your trees Japanese style, but some plants naturally give you beautiful contorted shapes with much less effort. The old standby in this category is “Harry Lauder’s Walking Stick” which has two new rivals, “Red Majestic”

and “Red Dragon.” The latter two shrubs have the same contortions as “Harry” but have burgundy foliage and pink winter catkins. Another contorted beauty is *Poncirus* “Flying Dragon”—smaller size, white flowers, and quarter-sized oranges. Unfortunately, the oranges are mega-sour!



Here's more proof that flowers aren't everything. *Azara microphylla* and *Sarcococca ruscifolia* are both evergreen shrubs that emit powerful yard-filling scents all out of proportion to their miniscule flowers. Some of our uninitiated customers stand next to these plants, noses in the air, looking all around for the source of the fragrance and never notice the flowers. We Lael's Moon Garden "moonies" are too polite to point and laugh.

Finally, there is sound. In our garden birds and frogs are the thing. The trees and shrubbery in our display garden provide nesting and hiding places for birds. (They even occasionally nest in trees we have for sale—oblivious to the fact we can't sell "their" tree until their brood is gone. Talk about biting the hand!) We also provide feeders, water and food plants for the little freeloaders. Our birds are not too fat to fly, but some of them take a long runway! Frogs provide pleasing sounds at night from all the moist hiding places the garden provides. They reduce the bug population too.

It's probably preaching to the choir to emphasize features other than flowers to our seasoned customers, so I'll get down off my soapbox now and get back to my glass of wine in the shade of my wisteria arbor.



Not a flower in this picture!

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