

Winning Plant Combination: Hot & Cool Colors

Kathy Bretz

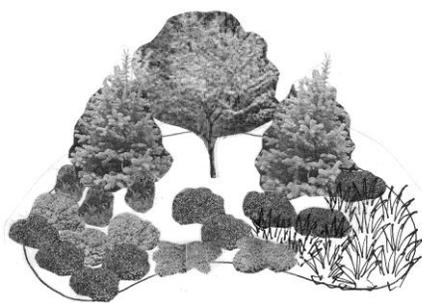
It seems I've *always* been drawn to striking hot and cool color combinations—in my home decorating, my artwork, and in the garden. There is just something about the contrast of the deep blues with chartreuse (my absolute favorite garden color), or burgundy with bright green or gold, that pleases my eye and makes me want more. I remember my “collage art phase” in high school when I won an art contest for a large tissue paper collage I'd done. Even then, the colors I chose were the same kind of hot and cool combo's—lots of vivid, deep blues over gold and bright, new-grass green.

In more recent projects with color in the garden, I've tried to improve my planning and design to make sure I cover all four seasons with color interest. I've looked for evergreens in various shades of green, blue and gold to provide backdrop and color contrast for the annuals and perennials that reach their color peak in the spring, summer and fall.

The plant combination featured here is one I'm anxious to try in a newly-formed sunny spot in my backyard where we lost a very large maple a couple summers ago. Kidney-shaped, the space is about 25 feet long and 10 feet wide at the edge of the trees, and forms part of the border along the small remaining patch of turf we will maintain in the backyard. The combo contains plants chosen for their low maintenance, drought tolerance and, of course, their color and form. None of these plants demands much from the soil, so the dominating clay in my yard is no issue. I'll try to be smart when planting this bed and install drip irrigation, which I won't feel guilty using during this prolonged drought.

For the evergreen backdrop, I've chosen 'Fat Albert' Spruce, and will position two of them at the back edge of this border garden, since they may need the protection of overhanging trees to tolerate summer heat. They'll grow very slowly to about 15 feet. In front of these gray-green spruces I want both a deep rose color and my favorite chartreuse hue, so I chose 'Rose Glow' Barberry for one side of the bed and 'Limemound' Spiraea for the other. Both will form 3-4 foot mounds of beautifully colorful foliage.

Between these groupings, a white dogwood such as 'Cherokee Sunset' will serve to anchor the border garden. So, the left side will have planting layers of the dogwood and spruce at the rear, and for color punch—spring through fall—a layer of 'Maraschino' Salvia will also feed hummingbirds and butterflies and provide some sweet fragrance. In front of the salvia, I'll place three 'Limemound' Spiraea, and edge the front of this border with 'Georgia Blue' Veronica. 'Georgia Blue' is one of my favorite edging plants, because it flowers profusely almost three full seasons and hangs on to its leaves for the winter. Its beautiful, almost-Gentian blue, blooms are gorgeous against Limemound's foliage. On the opposite side of this bed, I'll use the 'Rose Glow' Barberry in front of the spruce, and then allow bunches of variegated iris to spread and fill in the remaining space. The iris may mean a bit of maintenance to keep their spread in check and the border neat, but I can always share what I remove with friends! I'll use my favorite shade of chartreuse with golden Creeping Jenny to edge the front of the bed in the center. Here's a plant list and drawing to help you visualize the garden border (only wish this were in color!):



Plant List

Cornus florida 'Cherokee Sunset'
Picea pungens glauca 'Fat Albert'
Spiraea japonica 'Limemound'
Berberis thunbergii 'Rose Glow'
Salvia greggii X *microphylla* 'Maraschino'
Veronica peduncularis 'Georgia Blue'
Iris pallida 'Aureo-Variegata'
Lysimachia nummularia 'Aurea'

My plan is to start cultivating and composting this space during our warmer winter days, so it will be ready to plant in the spring. This is actually “Plan B” after the drought foiled my intention to do all this last fall. KB

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