



Borders in Landscape Design

Perennials are versatile plants that offer a variety of creative uses in the garden and offer an infinite number of exciting combinations. They add color, form, and texture, often for many years and with minimal maintenance. A look at some landscape possibilities should help to stimulate ideas for specific applications.

THE PERENNIAL BORDER

The perennial border style was inherited from England as a version of the cottage gardens that evolved during the 17th and 18th centuries. Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson proposed this style in rebellion against Victorian gardens. The gardens of upper class Victorians were typically geometric masses of brightly colored annuals maintained at a uniform height. Known as "bedding out," this style gained popularity after 1845 when the British government lifted the tax on glass, which lowered the cost of building greenhouses and made it possible to produce annuals economically and in quantity.

Jekyll and Robinson used more natural combinations for plants, mostly perennials, in their gardens. They extended the flower season from a few months in spring and summer to all year long with the use of bulbs, ornamental grasses, and old-fashioned plants and herbs collected from the simple gardens of English cottagers. Earth and plant forms inspired the new concept of garden design as the plants' season, ecology, and arrangement in nature created the basis for the design revolution.

Jekyll designed the English herbaceous border, carefully selecting plants and arranging them in long clumps of color she called "drifts." In her selection, she varied forms, heights, color and textures in her borders. The use of light and shade also contributes to the design adding

depth and dimension for the feeling of balance.

English herbaceous borders were usually limited in space by constructed walls or hedges, which not also provided a sense of continuity or organization. Strong, simple organization contrasts with the wide variety of plants, each plant displaying colors, forms, and textures and reaching its peak at a different time of the year.

The design philosophies used by Jekyll, Robinson and others are as appropriate today as ever. The challenge for designers is to be familiar with plants adapted to the Brazos Valley so the English herbaceous border can be successfully interpreted into our climate, topography, and lifestyle. A final consideration is that for herbaceous borders to be at their best, they require considerable space. For small properties, a cottage garden may be a more appropriate border. There are always exceptions, but minimum dimensions for borders should be in the range of 5 to 6 feet wide and 20 to 30 feet long. Wider and longer borders offer more opportunity for manipulation and gradation of color, form and texture.

THE MIXED BORDER

The mixed border is a combination of perennials, annuals, and flowering shrubs. The same design concepts that apply to the herbaceous border also apply to the mixed border, although it will usually require more space, since the effect is partially dependent on shrubs like old roses, as well as small, flowering trees. Having little bare ground showing is important for a fuller, more satisfying appearance. Less bare ground also means less opportunity for weeds to grow and compete with the ornamental plants.

In this manner, old garden roses offer many possibilities for integration with perennials and annuals. Many old roses are large and handsome shrubs, but there are also many intermediate and smaller types that are well-suited to modest sized properties.

Climbing roses and other flowering vines may also be trained on walls, trellises, and arbors to provide a sense of vertical space, useful in developing gardens into a series of outdoor rooms. The plan allows for the design of smaller areas featuring specific color ranges, plant specialties, or other garden themes.

Annuals are a way to quickly fill the empty spaces and provide quick color in mixed borders. For the first year or two after planting, mixed borders may appear a bit sparse because of the time roses and other flowering shrubs require to develop. During this interim, annuals can provide important fillers.