

Simple Guidelines for Beautiful Borders



PHOTO BY BONNIE COURTER

Dahlias are amongst the colorful offerings of summer blooms.

Question: I would like the borders in my garden to be full, colorful and inviting. I have selected beautiful plants but the borders look sparse and forlorn. What is the secret, if any?

Answer: Don't expect your borders to be done in one planting. It takes planning, time and following a few basic guidelines to eventually achieve the look you want (emphasis on the word eventually).

Your garden is a living thing that will grow and change over time. Since you are not starting from scratch and you may be adding to what you already have, you should still adhere to some guidelines for additional plants.

In your case, decide if you are keeping what you have. Ask yourself if they are in the correct spot for your purpose. Are they thriving? Based on your answers you will add to these or start over.



Margo Roten
Ask a Master Gardener

Have a theme or color scheme to guide you. Recommended border size is 2-3 yards but your yard size and your preference will determine that.

Place tall plants and shrubs to the back of the border. These will anchor the border and give it structure. Medium-sized plants are placed in the middle of the border in front of the tall plants. Use these plants to display your main flower color. Smaller plants are placed next toward the front of the border, interspersed throughout the border.

Aim for 80% being planted with perennials, with annuals and bulbs rounding it out.

Utilize plants that

Have a theme or color scheme to guide you. Recommended border size is 2-3 yards but your yard size and your preference will determine that.

COURTESY OF
CORNELL COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION



bloom or change color at different times so as to maximize year-round or seasonal interest. The most spectacular displays will be in the spring, summer and autumn. This is achieved by choosing flowers that bloom at different times and different seasons: spring, summer and then fall.

For full, lush borders, plant in groups or drifts of the same plants in odd numbers. For instance, plant five, seven, nine etc. in a curving or a tadpole-like design for a

more natural look. Avoid planting in rows.

If you have opposing borders, plant some of the same plants on both sides.

Select a nice variety but avoid too many different types of plants. Selecting fewer types of plants but repeating the same plant in groups gives a pleasing and cohesive look.

All plants included in your design should have similar growing requirements. This means before selecting a plant, you must ensure that each plant will thrive in your

zone. Additionally, each plant must have similar soil, sunlight/shade and water requirements.

Before selecting any plant, start to visualize how you want your border to look – the size of the plants, the textures and colors you want. Consider contrasting colors and textures for added interest. A sketch of the area and notes will help keep you on track.

With the design vision and knowledge of growing conditions in your border, you may now

begin to select plants that meet all of the criteria.

Spring bloomer suggestions: creeping phlox, pansy, tulips, daffodil, primrose, Iris, hellebore, columbine, alyssum and lupine.

Summer bloomers: hydrangea, lavender, cosmos, black-eyed susan, dahlia, fuchsia and canna lily.

Autumn bloomers: butterfly bush, strawflower, chrysanthemum, sedum, Japanese anemone, belladonna lily, willow-leaved sunflower and goldenrod.

Do you have a gardening or insect question?

Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.