

ESTABLISHING A FLORAL/ VEGETABLE GARDEN

In a productive and beautiful Appalachian garden we are convinced that vegetables and herbs can be interspersed in among the beauty of non-edible flowers. The traditional Appalachian garden consists mostly of flower and herbal interspersed with vegetables. Our efforts have the opposite intent, namely, to make a highly productive vegetable garden more aesthetically pleasing by interspersing with herbs and flowers. Either way, combining beauty and productivity requires additional care and planning. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. To many, squash flowers are as inspiring as any wildflower. May all gardeners explore to their hearts' content ways to combine beauty and function.

A Note on Selections. TP 48 (*Domestic Wildscape*) is directed to ornamental landscaping in contrast to lawn. The ASPI "wildscape," located on very rocky ground, utilizes native wild flowers and some naturalized Kentucky field flowers. However, in a formal setting of a cultivated garden, non-native, but nonetheless non-invasive, plants are accepted and recommended.

Aesthetics and Productivity. Vegetable growing is to be efficient as well as self-sustaining. Our ASPI research plots at Mount Vernon, consisting of fifteen one-hundred-square-foot beds, were not built primarily for beauty, but to easily gauge yield on a uniform space. However, in 1999, in order to enhance the aesthetics of the pragmatic garden beds, these were surrounded by pine fence pole cut-offs (waste materials) of various lengths. These experimental beds were not installed on natural soil, for the parking area had been blacktopped over living rock (layers of thin topsoil and loose rock were removed and excavated by blasting). We plan additional aesthetic improvements over time.

The following suggestions are for flower selection & location:

1. Seasonal Color Choices. Select specific flowers for each season. It is possible to map out the color arrangements by knowing what flowers to place in different parts of the garden. It is quite possible that the arrangements would emphasize seasonal colors (pale violets, pinks and yellows in spring, bright colors in summer and subdued crimson, yellow and gold in autumn). See table.



ASPI's raised garden beds in Mt. Vernon, Kentucky

2. Spatial Arrangement Selections. Choose flowers for spatial requirements at specific garden locations. Taller stem flowers fit best among greens, peanuts or low bushy or leafy root crops. Those that spread like *verbena*, *Missouri primrose*, or *baby's breath* could be planted at the edge of beds containing taller stem vegetables.

3. Harmonic Edges. We suggest that one plants bulky vegetables at the interior of garden beds and leave the outer borders for herbs and flowers where possible. Overflowing cucumbers or beans may not leave much room for flowers, but these could be planted at interior parts of the garden. Keep in mind that vegetable rotation is an important consideration as well.

4. **Garden Helpers, Companions and Edibles.** The mainstay of flower helpers is the golden or yellow *marigold*, which wards off a number of garden pests (e.g., harmful nematodes from tomato beds) and should be planted at strategic locations in the garden. We have discovered that Japanese beetles prefer *evening primrose* over such vegetables as pole beans or corn. *Nasturtiums* and other flowers are good for topping exquisite summer salads.

5. **Veggies and Herbs as Color Providers.** Some colorful vegetables and herbs add color to the gardens: brassicas such as *broccoli* or *kale* (also *mustard*) can go to seed and the stems produce a bright yellow flower; *rhubarb* and *Swiss chard* add bright red stems to the spring garden patch quilt; *vetch*, a winter cover crop, provides a light purple or pink bloom in May and June; *pokeweed*, whose young shoots taste like asparagus, matures with a red stem and late summer clusters of dark red or black berries; *salsify* or “oyster plant,” yields in its second year a pale purple flower in May; *sunflowers* are prominent in mid-summer; sweet and hot *peppers* can come in a variety of yellows, greens, reds and even purples for autumn color; and *Jerusalem artichokes* have clusters of small yellow “sunflowers” in late September and October. Purple *kohlrabi* and *turnips* add summer and autumn color, as do *beets*, *carrots* and *radishes* at various parts of the normal growing season. Colored *cabbage* can be used for late autumn decorative



Marigolds

Herbs for Color as Well as Culinary and Medicinal Uses

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) or “sweet basil” has a bush effect as being both a leaf and delicate white bloom provider and landscape greenery for much of the summer. We preserve the herbal flavor by immersing blooms and leaves in olive or vegetable oil for soups.

Borage (*Borago officinalis*) has a beautiful blue self-sowing plant that is a favorite for bees.

Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) grow in clumps and are a mild member of the onion family with a beautiful pink flower in May.

Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) has a purple flower and a profuse foliage used for green manure. As one of the best known medicinal herbs it is used externally to speed healing of wounds.

Evening Primrose (*Oenothera biennis*) opens a yellow bloom to meet the moon and is a handsome landscape addition to the garden.

Lavender (*Lavandula officinalis*) can come in dwarf varieties and has a fragrant, deep blue flower.

Mint - apple, spearmint, peppermint - Spearmint has attractive pink flowers in spring. Lemon mint (*Monarda citriodora*) is non-invasive and has pinkish-purple flowers.

Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*) Dark green foliage with pink to deep purple flowers.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) has a flower used as a herb.

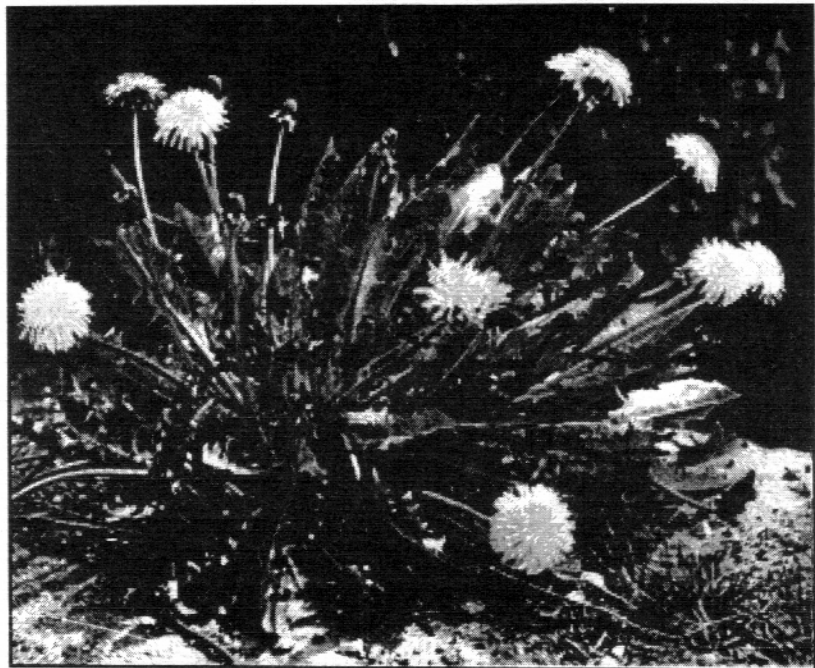
Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) has a lemony camphor odor and delicate blue flowers.

Savory (*Satureja hortensis*) Small purple flower.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) has a pale pink flower and is a nice evergreen landscape plant.

plants.

6. Weeds as Vegetables and Flower. For many the *dandelion* is a menace, but it is also one of the earliest of the greens in spring, is highly nutritious and it provides a beautiful flower that we have observed every month of the year in protected areas. Other normally termed weeds are used. *Wood sorrel* has a delicate yellow flower and provides lemony and good tasting clover leaves for sprinkling sparingly on salads. We encourage *lamb's quarters*, the oldest known edible among pre-historic Kentucky cave dwellers, as both a nutritious heritage plant and as an addition to the cooked greens pot. *Hens-bit* or *Purple-bit* is a good early weed that provides a March pink flower carpet to the garden landscape before vegetables are planted or grow. *Chickweed*, a nutritious and hearty plant, has a small white flower that appears even in winter months.



Dandelion

7. Flower Planting. Flower seed can be directly sown into well prepared, loosely textured soils. Some suggest soaking up to three hours (not too long) in warm water before planting. Seeds may take up to a month to germinate. Intermingling flowers takes added time and care to tend the flowers. When unfamiliar with the early plants there is the possibility of destruction through cultivation. Mark those coming from seed or start flowers indoors and transplant with vegetables in specified places.

8. Flower Cultivation. Generally the same attention must be given to growing flowers as vegetables and herbs. Some take special attention. For instance, we have found that *cosmos* raised singly or in small clumps are unable to stand upright in mild to heavy breezes and need the support of stakes. Many flowers need full sunlight and can be overly shaded by fast-growing vegetables.

Cornflowers or *bachelors buttons* and *poppies* grow well among the vegetables and are early bloomers. Tilling can hurt delicate root systems of flowers and proper mulching can help retain moisture and reduce weeds. Some flowers require water in times of drought. Consider dry or desert plants. Two plants for dry weather cropping in the Midwest are *tickseed/lance-leaved coreopsis* and *goldenrod*.

9. Flower Harvesting. Cut flowers in the early morning when flowers are the freshest. Some suggest cutting with a clean knife that has been dipped in a 10% solution of household bleach. Others suggest adding aspirin to vase water to extend cut flower life.

Caution: Toxic but Beautiful Plants. While *daffodils* are excellent for early blooming landscapes, these should be excluded if outsiders are allowed in the garden. Daffodil bulbs resemble onions without the characteristic onion odor however. Others that add color include the *castor bean* or "mole bean" (discourages moles and voles) which grows tall in mid-summer to autumn and forms a beautiful red-stemmed and palm leafed plant that should be placed on the north side to avoid shading other crops. The seeds and parts of the plant are highly toxic to animals and humans as well.

The seeds and leaves of the *rocket larkspur* are poisonous if consumed. *Foxglove* is extremely poisonous.

TABLE Twenty Flowers for Different Times of Year

Begonias (summer to autumn) A low growing plant that can be potted and taken in through the winter.

Chrysanthemums or “mums” (autumn) A marigold family member with bright yellow, white, red or purple flowers. Pots are stored in greenhouse over winter.

Cosmos (summer to late fall) A non-native that blooms with an array of colors with each flower for short periods but seed will easily restart.

Evening Primrose (mid-summer) A good garden helper and a good blooming plant with yellow flowers. It reseeds and comes back year after year.

Geraniums (all year) Kept in greenhouse in winter and outdoors the other seasons. Flowers are vivid reds and pinks. Wild geraniums add spring color as well.

Gladiolus (summer and autumn) Raised by my uncle in his productive vegetable garden for aesthetical reasons.

Goldenrod (late summer to autumn) A native to Kentucky which volunteers and can be hurt by excessive cultivation.

Hummingbird Plant (*Ipomopsis Rubra*) (summer to autumn) This is a red annual with excellent weather tolerance.

Impatiens (late spring to frost) This member of the balsam family has a wide variety of colors and will burst and scatter seeds when ripe. Volunteers will return.

Ironweed (late summer) A violet blossom on a very tall plant that is majestic in appearance.

Jewel Weed (autumn) A whorled yellow to orange flowered plant that is native to Appalachia.

Lupin (summer) A whorled yellow, white and lavender blue plant that grows well on fences.

Marigolds (summer into late autumn)

Nasturtiums (late spring through summer) An edible flower that has shield-shaped leaves with flowers that are brilliant yellow, red or orange. These need water.

Pansy (all seasons, especially in winter) A good flower because it can be dwarf and not use much room and yet can brighten the garden all winter with a profusion of colors.

Petunias (spring to autumn) A variety of colors in a low lying plant that can be placed along edges under higher growing vegetables such as peppers. We have found that sow bugs eat up the petunia blossom.

Poppies (late spring) A good addition to the garden which are perennial as well.

Sweet peas (summer to autumn) This trellis plant can be interplanted with other vine vegetables such as cucumbers.

Verbena (spring) Edge plant with brilliant color.

Zinnia (summer) A bright varied colored annual with many summer blossoms.