



GARDEN ESTHETICS

The advantage of having perennials in your garden is that they return every year. The disadvantage is that their bloom period is usually not more than a few weeks. Annuals often bloom all summer, but they need replacing every year. A mixed border containing both, along with flowering or evergreen shrubs to anchor them, is ideal.

The lovely English Cottage Garden look is difficult to achieve in this climate. However, with a mixture of shrubs, perennials and annuals, we can have a bountiful and colorful garden. Flower beds here need some shrubbery to stabilize and provide continuity of design as the blossoms from perennials and annuals come and go.

And come and go they will. Our summer nights do not cool down enough to give plants time to recover from the scorching daytime heat. They continue to transpire 24 hours a day. The good news/bad news of this is that our plants reach maturity quicker. Good news for trees and shrubs, but often bad news for annuals and perennials since bloom time can be shortened. Flowers such as lilies, for example, that list bloom time as July or August, are exhausted before the end of June. Shrubby is the backbone that keeps our beds from looking raggedy as our perennials and annuals stop blooming. An investment in a shrub can last a lifetime. Suggestions for shrubbery to augment your flower beds will be found elsewhere in this report.

The prime rule of gardening is "Right Plant. Right Place". Yes, we all have favorite plants that we mollycoddle because we love them, even though they don't belong in this climate. But they must be really special to deserve this treatment. And all too often, the plant fails to thrive and will succumb anyway. Giving plants winter vacations in your garage can quickly get out of hand. It is far better to try and find a climate appropriate plant that gives the same effect. Think a clump of crinums instead of a peony.

To avoid a nervous and untidy look to your beds, plant in drifts of three to five plants, and repeat those groupings throughout your gardens. Stay away from planting in rows like soldiers on parade. Plant in clumps with taller plants in the back, tapering down as you go forward. Vary the texture and shape of the plants to provide interest. Plant spiky next to mounding, big leaves next to lacy ones. Plants with silvery foliage help to make transitions between colors, and the importance of white cannot be overemphasized. To have a harmonious garden, limit your color palate. Too many colors give a kaleidoscope effect.

A garden is always a work in progress. It takes time to achieve a full and bountiful garden. Set your garden goals realistically. It is better to complete one bed before going to the next. Do your research. A little time spent in research will save a lot in dollars and disappointments. Look at what does well in your neighbor's garden, in parks and other public spaces. Visit botanical gardens in person or on line. The library has excellent books on gardening in the south and on garden design.

Happy Gardening!