

DISPELLING GARDEN MYTHS

Recently I have been informed by my client that taller perennials cannot be planted near the front of the border and must be located in the back. Of course I have heard this statement before but I do not always follow it. When I told this to her – she was shocked to say the least. Maybe you are shocked as well so I will explain my reasoning.

I believe in guidelines for gardening but should we follow them without question? I think that taller perennials may be planted at the front of the border providing they give some architectural interest or hide whatever lies behind them. Generally, I do plant larger perennials toward the back of a perennial border – except in certain situations. I will not hesitate to plant larger shrubs toward the front of the border.

I try not to focus on the individual perennial but to think about how it would look in a group setting surrounded by other plant material. I also go through the garden bed in my mind to picture what the garden will look like in all four seasons: winter, summer, fall and spring. I place plants not just according to height. There are many other design factors to consider when designing a planting bed. I often think about the texture and foliage colour of the perennials as well as blooming time before I consider height.

Unusual planting combinations that work well together will have different blooming times, height variations and contrasting textures. I have suggested three to try out.

Hosta and solomon seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*). This unusual ‘opposites attract’ combination works well in a shade garden. Hostas have bold big leaves while solomon seal have dainty foliage and delicate looking

flowers. The colour combination of the two perennials is coordinated with green and white brightening up any dark corner in your garden.

Oriental Poppy (*Papaver orientale*) and Siberian Iris (*Iris sibirica*). These two sun loving perennials help each other out when one is in bloom and the other is not. Iris bloom in the spring and the fabulous foliage of the iris hide the Oriental poppy when it’s finished blooming in midsummer.

Sedum ‘Autumn Joy’ (*Sedum ‘Autumn Joy’*) and Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum*). The heights are vastly different with the sedum about one third the height of the grass – but it is a lovely combination especially in the late fall. Both offer different architectural shapes to the garden: the grass has strong vertical lines in a columnar shape while the sedum is more oval shaped.

Don’t be afraid to bring a taller perennial to the front of the border; your garden is your own unique creation and experimenting with different plants is fun!

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