



# Color schemes in flower change-outs

*The seasons point the way to the best color choices for planting beds that are changed out regularly.*

by LEAH ROTTKE

**S**pring color, when used with precision, can be the crowning touch to a landscaping project. Accurate color design and placement builds a landscape that sparkles with surprise, season after season.

#### Warm or cool colors

Red, orange and yellow fall on the warm side of the color divider. Blues, purples and greens are the cool colors. What matters most is the different effects the warm and cool colors have on people.

Cool colors appear to *recede*; warm colors *advance*. That's why "hot" colors seem to leap out at us. Use these optical tendencies to steer attention through the landscape.

Instead of trimming a winding pathway with a non-stop, strident blast of color, invite a stroll with subtle highlights at key points: the entry, the inside curves, and position a warm color planting at the end to draw the viewer along. Using cool colors is the age-old way to make a small space seem larger.

#### Customer preference counts

Customers prefer some colors more than others. If the customer dislikes yellow, that narrows your choices. If the customer dislikes yellow and loves red, that narrows your selection even further.

Many blue flowers fade in strong sunlight, and regardless of the pigment's strength, they seem to disappear altogether when viewed from a distance. Stick to good performers, and accent far-off blues with white. For commercial clients, start with "company colors," as well as colors used in the interior landscaping.

#### Seasons a guide

The seasons point the way to the best color choices for planting beds changed out regularly:

- ▶ browned reds, yellows and oranges signify autumn, an echo to falling leaves;
- ▶ spring typically calls for a show of clean, clear hues and an abundance of pastels.
- ▶ at any time, white is the essential focus sharpener and color brightener.

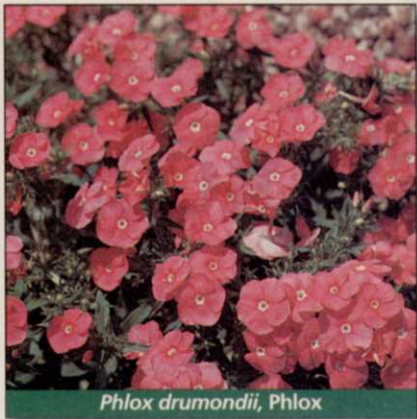
#### Four color schemes

The four basic color schemes can be cre-



*Nemesia strumosa*, *Nemesia*





*Phlox drummondii*, Phlox

ated with warm or cool colors, or a combination of both.

**1. Monochromatic:** one color only, including its *shades* (darker than the true color) and *tints* (lighter than the true color). The monochromatic scheme can have great impact, but it demands skill in arranging shades and tints.

**2. Analogous:** it's tough to go wrong with this scheme. Three colors, as well as their shades and tints, that fall side by side on the color wheel (such as, yellow/yellow-orange/orange). This scheme is used most often.

**3. Contrasting:** two opposite colors, like blue and orange, but not in equal amounts. The minority color intensifies the other. Compare dots of blue in a field of orange, to flecks of orange in a stand of blue.

**4. Kaleidoscopic:** a multi-colored blend that must be properly balanced so no single hue appears to dominate. Wildflower meadow plantings are a common example.

#### Position and arrangement

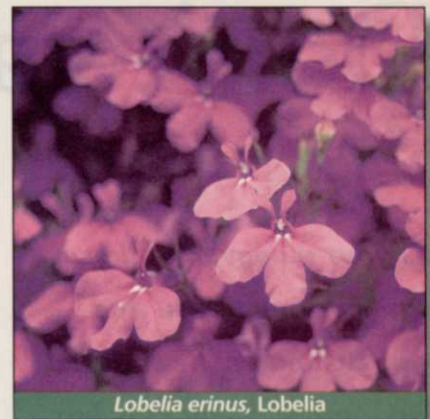
Efforts toward good color design go unseen without equally good placement through the landscape.

Placement means two things: designating the position of the entire color planting and arranging the plants within it. Flowers need to be placed where intense attention is called for, at focal points such as front doorways, water features, entry signs, monument walls, statuary or the view from a picture window. Color power lies in massing blooms in groups of the same cultivar, rather than strings or alternating, one-plant dots.

Scattering annuals below and between evergreen shrubs disrupts the textural pattern created by the foliage and shatters the impact of the color.

Use the shrubs as a backdrop and stage a color planting in front. Build bands of color, in different shades or tints, that "step" down from the back to the front of a foundation planting. □

*Leah Rotke is an irrigation/horticulture consultant based in San Diego, Calif. Watch for Part II of this 'color' series in the April LM.*



*Lobelia erinus*, Lobelia

## Beyond pansies: proven performers

Spring color ought to mean more than a carpet of pansies from coast to coast. Monocultures beckon devastation and breed boredom. The few plants mentioned below are proven spring performers anywhere, but offer a regional interest when used in plantings close to home. Natives are denoted with an asterisk.

#### NORTHEAST

***Consolida ambigua*, Larkspur:** get the delphinium look with an easier, longer blooming plant, two- to four-inches.

***Nemesia strumosa*, Nemesia:** warm-colored edger, half-hardy, summer bloom in cool climates.

#### SOUTH

***Matthiola incana*, Stock:** fragrance adds interest. Single and double flower forms.

***Heliotropium arborescens*, Heliotrope:** tender perennial grown as annual, dark purple fragrant bloom heads, carried above foliage.

#### MIDWEST

***Phlox drummondii*, Phlox:** widely hybridized, colors range from red to watercolor pastels; six- to 20-inches tall, six-inches on center.

***Linum perenne lewisii*, Blue Flax:** sky blue, 1½-inch flowers; stems go to

two-feet; leafless below blooms, tendency to self-sow.

***Linaria maroccana*, Toadflax:** mixed colors available; eight- to 12-inches tall; good edger with taller snaps.

#### PACIFIC NORTHWEST

**\**Clarkia hybrids*, Godetia:** cup-shaped flowers, one- to three-inches wide, massed atop plants 18- to 24-inches tall. pastels and bicolors available.

***Convolvus tricolor*, Bush Morning Glory:** same flower but not a vining plant; 12-inches tall, 12-inches on center; blue, purple, pink and bicolors with yellow accent.

***Lobelia erinus*, Lobelia:** everybody's edger; blue, light blue or white, four- to eight-inches tall.

#### SOUTHWEST

**\**Eschscholzia californica*, California Poppy:** grown the world over, hybrids in yellow and other pastels, best from seed and will self-sow.

**\**Nemophila menziesii*, Baby Blue Eyes:** widely-grown native; six- to 12-inches tall, six-inches on center.

**\**Phacelia campanularia*, Desert Bluebells:** hybrids even deeper blue; six- to 18-inches tall; blooms on stems carried above foliage.

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