

Bold Flower Garden Ideas

A vibrant flower garden with rows of yellow, pink, and purple flowers, a wooden bench, and trees in the background.

G. Edwin Varner

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Published in, 2025.

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First edition. March 12, 2025.

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ISBN: 979-8230733485

Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

Are you a new home gardener considering constructing a few flower beds or borders? Do you have an established flower garden that looks neglected and overgrown with lackluster displays? Consider a flower garden restoration project by establishing a specific theme garden (or gardens) based on your floral interests and enjoyment. This ebook explores the “pros and cons” of selecting that unique garden theme.

The digital photos feature flowers from my home, public gardens, and various nurseries in my area. Additionally, there are Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

Flower gardens come in all sizes and shapes. Some homeowners may have limited space, while others have more land than they know what to do with. Newly built homes temporarily lack a well-defined area to become a future garden. In contrast, older homes sadly inherit a previous occupant's misguided attempts to create a floral paradise.

All gardens ultimately tend to allow nature to run amok with botanical mayhem. No matter the garden's condition and location, continuous improvement can always be achieved by transforming an eyesore into one of genuine beauty.

Suppose you are considering developing a new flower garden or rejuvenating an existing one. In that case, this ebook identifies several beautiful flower garden themes you can develop individually or with the assistance of professional landscapers. For newly built homes and lots, consider contacting a consultant to advise you on what plants would grow well in specific locations based on sun and shade exposure and moisture needs.

The landscaper option would also be the best solution for redeveloping older, overgrown beds and borders. Landscapers have the tools and expertise to remove established weeds and worn-out plants. They can also refurbish old gardens with new nutrient-laden soil. Older flower gardens are temporary; you can always decide what plants to display based on your interests and creativity.

This publication offers you an assortment of traditional and modern takes on establishing your version of floral utopia. Each one is not perfect, so be prepared to face the conflicting consequences of your decision. No matter which theme may intrigue you to develop, don't grow flowers to impress others. Instead, grow the flowers you will enjoy now and into the future.

Please Note: The following list of garden themes is not in alphabetical order. I have arranged them in a semi-logical (at least, to me) order,

beginning with developing a flower garden with less lawn and then extending to more specific garden examples.

An Island Flower Bed Garden

Charting A Beautiful Course



This flower garden style involves downsizing your lawn. Forget about traditional lawn sizes and shapes; consider transforming a lawn into green pathways surrounding each archipelago of blooming plants.

If you have a small grassy area or live without a lawn — thank your lucky stars. Celebrate with French champagne or Diet Pepsi (whichever is more affordable or bubbly). Lawns or yards can be attractive or become a sickly green shade of frustration.

I am unsure about the rest of the world, but we Americans have a torrid love affair with large lawns and lawnmowers. This love fest with grass involves owning extensive areas of land. We seem to dwell on having

our own “back 40”—a spread of prime, grassy acres best suited for cattle grazing but with no immediate need for owning cattle.

As I age, I prefer to end this lawn-loving affair. Yes, lawns look picturesque, with a backdrop of a house edged with white picket fences, trees, and flower beds. The trouble is the maintenance, time, and money spent keeping them green and more manicured than our fingernails. Grass can have its charm, especially as a meandering green border separating flower beds and house borders. The question for you to answer is how large of a swath of lawn you wish to have.

In this flower garden, grassy pathways surround several larger beds. Think of them as green, winding, single-lane roads inviting you to stroll and admire the floral residents of each island bed. These lawn lanes can take on any rounded pattern you want to create. Outline a route for your grassy pathways using powdered limestone (similar to what’s used for marking yard lines on a football field), while the remaining larger sections of your lawn can eventually be transformed into distinct flower beds.

How wide should your grass lane road be? Since the grass will need to be cut, have the width be slightly more than the total width of your self-propelled or walk-behind mower. The same holds for a tractor-type mower, but consider the added width of the discharge chute. Speaking of which, try to have a mower with an attached bag assembly to hold the spent grass clippings. Without one, the grass being forcibly flung onto your flowers will make for a horrible display and later cause fungus disease problems.

Another alternative—drastic as it may be—is to kill off the remaining grassy road and replace it with mulch or a pea-sized grave. Hey, let’s go wild and include artificial grass. Then again, DON’T. Constructing this type of flower garden plan will take mucho dinero. Still, you will save on owning and using a lawnmower (or lawn service business account), gas for the mower, and the usual expense of mower repair.

For now, let’s consider a natural grassy lane meandering around several floral islands. It seems more “natural” in a park-like environment. Each

bed can be of different flowering plants blooming in varying stages of the growing season. There are many choices of what you wish to plant. Always remember to take account of the various mature heights of flowering plants. Tall-growing ones need to be planted in the center of each bed, while smaller types need to be arranged outward.

Instead of a regular lawn or grassy pathway, you can substitute with a ground cover of perennial-growing chamomile, thyme, or ground-hugging sedum varieties. These plants can withstand occasional foot traffic (more so the chamomile), but placements of flat stepping stones would be advisable. More information about using these plants will be covered later in the Groundcover Garden section.

A Carpet Garden Display

At Least You Don't Have To Vacuum



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The “invention” of creating flower beds began a few generations ago. Flower seed businesses (along with their tempting and addictive mail-order catalogs) suddenly germinated throughout the country, allowing homeowners to purchase and later grow pretty flowers along and near their houses.

Imagine all those once-novelty flowers we now take for granted. These bedding flowers (primarily annuals) can be easily started by sowing them in beds, providing bright colors all summer and fall.

Most early flower beds began as two-dimensional layers or carpets weaved with hundreds of similar-sized dwarf annual plants of the same color or with vivid combinations of colors. Two words immediately describe this popular garden display: eye-catching but generic.

This appearance was common then, as it is now, in many homes and locations. One reason is that it is a simple form of gardening. While it can be attractive, it can become boring after repeated viewings. It is delightfully startling at first glance but later becomes stereotyped; every bed and border mimics other gardeners' displays.

Years ago, I owned and operated a small nursery that grew several perennials and annual bedding flowers. My pet peeve with customers was their constant worry that the annual flowers would “grow too tall.” Any plant growing above two feet caused a wide-eyed, panicky expression. They considered taller annuals and perennials unappealing, in contrast to the “nice-and-short” flowers.

Don't be afraid to raise your flower gardens to new heights of attraction and pleasure. Instead of planting boring beds of ankle-to-kneecap level flower displays, it's time to cultivate and admire plants displaying colorful eye-level and some sky-level blossoms. For some “excitement” (if gardening provides any), let's experience the splendor of multi-level flower gardening — starting from the ground and going way up — if you dare to do so. Do not always look down at flowers; instead, stare upward at them.

The Cottage Garden Look

Pretty As A Picture



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It is difficult to determine which came first, the carpet garden style described above or the quaint cottage garden theme described here. Each is the opposite of the other. Carpet gardens equate with order, stability, and formality, while cottage gardens reject those ideals and replace them with boldness, flamboyance, and messiness.

Years ago, gardeners planted beautiful flowers of all types and sizes in their gardens. They embraced three-dimensional flower gardening, placing taller-growing flowers toward the back of a border to avoid growth conflicts with smaller plants. Towering delphiniums and foxgloves shared beds and borders with small petunias and marigolds.

Today, many new gardeners are first aware of this type of flower garden design by reading old garden books and viewing oil paintings or black-and-white photos. The key word is “old,” which explains this design. It is not an undesirable look, but for today’s neighborhood appearances, a proper cottage garden is, let’s be frank, pretty much rare and outdated.

We do not see any “hobbit house design” cottages (as those seen in the plentiful movie sequels of *Lord of the Rings*) nearby. The closest we see these types of dwellings is in those Thomas Kinkade paintings, where the interior lighting is well underway of a massive three-alarm blaze. I can always hear the firetrucks approaching when viewing those paintings.

Those houses are surrounded by a forest of perpetual springtime blooming trees and bushes, highlighted with various-sized layers of blooming perennials. The surrounding gardens usually come perilously close to waterfalls and streams. These paintings are not realistic nor worthy of mention in *Home and Garden* magazine. They certainly would not pass community zoning regulations. Still, the concept is alluring to many people on some subconscious-minded level. Who can resist tranquility imbued with gorgeous outdoor beauty?

One thing to realize in most cottage garden appearances is that no grassy yard or extensive lawn is in sight. To many people, that is an ideal situation. Why bother sowing, growing, and constantly mowing a lawn when that soil could raise those (ideally) perpetually blooming trees, shrubs, and abundant flowers? Some people have done such design—without the small hobbit houses or weirdly designed Kinkade homesteads.

I forget her name, and it has been several years since our last meeting. She became a regular customer at my flower nursery. Most customers select familiar plants to add to their flower beds, but she was still trying to purchase many of my rare perennials. She, a college history professor, and her husband, a lawyer, lived in another city. She knew of my flower nursery from a friend, and it was a pilgrimage to visit it each spring.

We would stride from table to table, selecting different varieties of unusual perennials. I inquired about the size of her perennial bed or border, and her reply startled me. *“Oh, not one bed, but many. I destroyed my lawn a few years ago and replaced it with flowers. LOTS of them! I wanted a cottage garden look, and we decided to make it happen.”*

I must have had a confused look, for she laughed and told me she gets plenty of similar looks from people. She then described her decision to turn her lawn into one vast flower garden. Seeing a painting in an art book, she turned her home into one giant flower bed worthy of that painting. To her, it was life imitating art. An Impressionistic painting specifically enamored her (I forget which one, but it is probably one by Claude Monet) of a rural French cottage surrounded by vividly colorful flowers. No lawn was in sight – only beds and borders of tall-growing delphiniums, gladiolus, sunflowers, poppies, and other floral splendors.

She grew tired of mowing grass and the cost of maintaining it, especially with the trials and tribulations of owning a lawnmower. *“I hated my lawn but loved my flower beds,”* she said. *“So, I destroyed the lawn and spent my time and money to capture the essence of that painting.”* She detailed how she “nuked” the lawn with herbicide, had a landscape company work up the soil, added extra sand and topsoil, and contoured the area for it to drain better. Then, she researched garden books to decide which bulbs, perennials, shrubs, and small trees she could plant depending on the growing zone.

Her reasoning, descriptions, and enthusiasm dramatically impacted me that day so that I could relate (as much as possible) to her words and excitement. Her home (or gardens) looked like one of those old-time garden paintings. It was not one large garden but several beds interconnected with gravel walkways. Not one blade of grass was present. She yanked it out if she found a clump growing with the flowers. The same applied to dandelions and other weedy undesirables.

How did she manage all these flowers? She walked the grounds daily, noting where to add more mulch and which plants looked ill from disease or insects. Her only regret was not growing roses, for they

demanded too much attention to hold blackspot fungus and Japanese Beetles (*Popillia japonica*) at bay. Who needs thorns when there are so many other beautiful flowers and shrubs to plant?

On one visit with her that long ago midsummer, her gardens were ablaze with vivid colors. She even had her own “secret garden” enclosed by a vine-covered fence and a gate to keep the stressful world from peering inside. Inside this garden was a shady pergola containing two comfy recliners and a table. She and her husband would take naps or read books there.

She planted her gardens not based on any themes, only on what impressed her. If a perennial or annual was unique or had exceptional beauty, she found some space to plant it. Like her, I prefer outlandish gardening over specific monochromatic designs or themes. If a plant is gorgeous, rare, or unusual, plant it front and center to admire it. Even today, I recall those inspiring visits with that marvelous lady and admiring her amazing always-in-bloom gardens.

With increased knowledge and greater availability of many flower varieties and colors, more professional growers, landscapers, and homeowners are recreating the gardens of small cottages and large estates. If you have the inspiration, determination, and, yes, money, then here is one such garden design to develop. A rural location would be best since a residential lot would raise too many eyebrows and attract zoning inspectors and other “make your life difficult” officials. Make sure to keep your floral homestead away from Kincade-esque waterfalls, cliffs, and white-capped streams or rivers.

A Spreading Groundcover Garden

There Is Beauty Underfoot



Contrary to my harsh opinion in the above Carpet Garden section using only low-growing annuals while freaking out about taller growing types, you may deliberately have to consider true groundcover or miniature plantings. With groundcover plants, you can change that drab eyesore plot of ground into a vast vista of outstanding color each year.

Ground-covering plants (especially those with profuse blooming) are ideal solutions for complex landscaping problems. The interlocking growing plants smother weeds, cool the soil for better root development, and restrict water evaporation loss, so you water less often. If you plant them on a slope, they will also control or prevent soil erosion.

Ground covers can be used as partial lawn substitutes with the above less-lawn garden style, mainly as boundary plantings between beds and borders. Perennial plantings of ground-hugging (and highly fragrant) chamomile and thyme will provide additional pleasure. You can achieve an attractive display by using flat stepping stones or pavers to navigate your garden.

Blanketing an area with any ground cover may require purchasing several plants or a large quantity of seed. This will require money and more initial work to get the ground suitable for planting. But think of this as an investment for greater rewards. Within time, the result is an extensive carpet of beauty that will eventually require less maintenance and labor, depending on which plants you use.

Your best bet is to use hardy perennial plants that return yearly. Most offer vibrant flower colors that add to the enjoyment of a usually dull area. Some colorful annual bedding plants also spread, but covering a less extensive area is more prudent. Consider them when preparing an enlarged bed and co-plant them with low-growing, spreading perennials for summer blooming. You can add some shrubs or small blooming trees to provide height above those ground-spreading flowers.

Developing an enlarged area to establish a low-maintenance ground cover takes time, money, and labor. You must declare truthfully if the plan is feasible based on your lifestyle. The job could become overwhelming and over budget, even if you are a DIY (do-it-yourself) person.

Contact your local larger garden center to inquire which ground covers would thrive in your area. Better yet, seek a professional landscaping service with free consulting assistance to review your garden's layout, soil chemistry, structure, and sun-to-shade ratio requirements.

Although we think we can handle all the work involved in developing a sizable ground cover, it can become a *"What have I gotten myself into?"* nightmare. Professional landscaping businesses have the manpower,

machinery, and tools to develop an area in less time and at less expense than DIY projects.

Landscapers can also help you choose the best plants and quantities. They can obtain wholesale-priced plants of what you wish or what they recommend growing. Take their help and advice for less worry and work-related issues.

Finally, a word of warning concerning the potential for excessive or invasive growth of a few specific ground covers. Depending on your climate, some plants, under ideal environmental growth conditions, can overextend the boundaries you impose. That overgrowth can reach into your neighbor's lot or, theoretically, in a worst-case scenario, in your general region. Any plant has that potential, so observe how well your ground cover spreads. It's time to cut off those excessively growing horizontal shoots if they extend too far out of bounds.

Before purchasing any plants, please check your local agricultural extension office for updated information about any that may be problematic in your area.

The YOLO Gardening Experience

Dare To Be Unique!



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The previous flower gardening styles may be fine for some people, but how about you? Are you not keen on prim and proper placement of plants that complement each other or based on size, color, and bloom time? Maybe you are a rebel – an *“I want to do it MY Way”* self-confident person. Well, good for you! The YOLO gardening theme (actually, an experience) is your sort of flower gardening.

YOLO is a cute acronym for *“You Only Live Once.”* Instead of hang gliding, mountain climbing, or betting your life savings in a high-stakes poker game, this is a safer action that encourages you to live life to a reasonable fullest – in this case – by flower gardening.

Most of the following garden themes are more specific in which plants you can work with. You would think that specialty planning is counterproductive in establishing your particular independent style of flower gardening, but it is not. YOLO gardening is a delightful learning experience; you can experiment with raising unusual flowers or combinations of striking dissimilarities. Still, each plant should have similar environmental characteristics such as light requirements, soil pH, and moisture levels to provide successful displays.

You do not have to enjoy a garden with the occasional viewing of the flowers. Creating an interactive outdoor living area amongst those flowers is another activity. Surround your flower beds with a water garden, waterproof reclining chairs (or even a sofa for occasion napping), a small grill for hot snacks, and bird feeders to attract songbirds and hummingbirds. This area can be your secret garden for your retreat or as a private respite for entertaining special guests and friends.

The point of the YOLO garden themes in the following sections is to help you plan and implement the garden of your dreams. It will take time to develop, but once completed, you can bask in the beauty and serenity of your creation. It's ultimately for your pleasure to be away from stressful everyday living activities.

Let's disregard caution and consider the delightfully messy theme described next. Sprinkle flower seeds all over the beds or borders and let "whatever" flowers grow. The main idea is to have fun and be carefree without limitations or expectations.

Chaos Gardening

The No-Rules Flower Garden



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Like the above YOLO Garden section, this form of flower gardening allows you to plant whatever your heart desires. For many, this concept of a disorganized flower garden envisions a kaleidoscope of various clashing colors, which some consider rather tacky. So be it, but you can't complain about it not being outrageously beautiful.

A slight problem arises in forming this garden type — what to plant and where. For this section, it doesn't matter; if the flowers are pretty, grow them no matter what they are. Plant annuals with bulbs, perennials, and small shrubs. Who cares if the flower colors are mismatched or gaudy and bloom whenever they do? Sow the seeds, order the plants, or

purchase ones offered in garden centers. What grows is inconsequential. The idea of this garden is to reap the benefits of unsurpassed beauty for the entire growing season and, possibly, into the following year.

I was drawn or gravitated from an early age toward this no-rules garden. Well, that no-rules idea is not entirely correct. Depending on the location of your garden layout and soil structure, you need to grow “like-minded” plants together. Those who prefer more sun or shade should be grown together and adapt to dry or moist soil. Let those pretty plants fend for themselves and adjust, for Pete’s sake. Let’s break some rules and be rebels. If they grow — enjoy the sight!

Why should you consider this type of flower garden plan? One reason is to prevent boredom. Are you dreading growing the same annual plants sold in seed catalogs and garden centers each summer? Are you tired of viewing those usual yawn-inducing impatiens, red geraniums, marigolds, petunias, and zinnias? Do you wish you could spruce up your beds and borders so they can “pop and zing” with vitality?

If you have expressed those doldrum thoughts lately, it’s time to find an uplifting solution to this defeatist attitude. You can find some compelling, unusual, and intriguing plants ready to energize your summer with fantastic beauty. You will feel the pleasure of flower gardening returning after a long absence. Don’t be a conformist — be a rebellious or revolutionary gardener abandoning the commonly grown flowering plants in favor of raising the lesser-known ones.

Garden centers rarely offer unusual and rare bedding and border plants. Still, you may find them in specialty seed or plant online nursery businesses. Some varieties are challenging to locate but well worth the search and cost.

Several of these unusual plants are quick-growing and long-blooming. They will give you an energizing jolt of surprise and satisfaction that recaptures the pride of being or becoming an adventurous flower gardener.

I have no proof, only a “feeling,” that the longer we garden, the more time this activity drains, and the more the plants available appear lackluster. The unfortunate result is that we should consider ending this activity. Hopefully, this attitude is temporary and not permanent. Flower (and vegetable) gardening is a cathartic activity that purges our daily chaotic thoughts and actions. We strive to have individualistic ideas and interests in a society of conflicting beliefs and behaviors. Gardening will always be a silent rebellion against dogmatic societal consistency and conformity.

You can always create a garden that is different from everyone else. The ultimate formation is creating this transforming chaotic garden. Find several exciting plants to grow, get your hands dirty, and enjoy the unexpected beauty that follows. Creativity is always enjoyable but also personal.

Now that we have explored the “big picture” of what generalized flower gardens you can establish based on lawn coverage and plantings, it’s time to fine-tune on popular specific garden themes or designs. These themes will always be based on the above traditional or chaotic base subjects. You can include as many similar-based flowering plants as you wish, no matter the size or color of each flower. Here is where your creativity will shine and be admired.

A Drought-Tolerant Garden

Waterwise Precautions



The Ground Cover Garden plan mentions that low-growing and spreading plantings can help retain soil moisture. Therefore, developing another garden style with many popular flowering plants that can handle occasional (and even extended) severe droughts while

still providing beautiful blooms seems reasonable. With this knowledge, you'll be well-prepared for the challenges of any dry summer.

Several plants, especially perennials, shrubs, and trees, adapt to occasionally arid conditions when fully mature. These plants can help lower your ever-increasing water bills, decrease watering time and labor, and still provide plenty of beauty throughout a dry growing season.

Please understand that there are limits to less watering that can seriously affect any plant's growth, blooming, and survivability. Plant growth and adaptability depend on your regional climate, water retention in your garden soil, and methods for helping retain that soil moisture for as long as possible during a lengthy period without rainfall.

Consider implementing the following water-conserving activities even if you do not suffer from periodic droughts. They help conserve water, ease your workload, and allow more time for other activities. The main advantage for your garden plants is better growth and blooming.

You need to prioritize which plants need more watering attention during a drought. More expensive plantings, such as newly planted or immature shrubs and trees, should be at the top of your regular watering regime. Next should be your perennial plants, and lastly, annuals, for they are the least expensive and can be easily replaced.

Mature lawns should not be watered and be allowed to go dormant. Yes, a brown, "crunchy" lawn is not aesthetically pleasing, but regular lawn grass is adapted to undergo dormancy and will regrow when regular rainfall returns. Watering your lawn uses too much water and "ups" your usage bill. Try not to establish a new lawn in the summer. Wait until fall when regular rainfall returns.

Apply mulch to your flower and vegetable gardens. The mulch can be made of compost, woodchips, shredded bark, pea-sized gravel, or even a water-permeable inorganic tarp to cover the ground. Remember,

mulch does three essential processes. It slowly releases nutrients into the ground while decomposing percolates water into the soil and retains it there. It also helps prevent or significantly lessen the development of weeds.

These benefits should reassure you that your gardening practices are on the right track. If your garden is too large or material costs prohibit you from applying a mulch, thoroughly soak the soil each week when watering the beds or borders. A good soaking incorporates water deeper into the ground for better downward root development.

A Native Plant Garden

Indigenous Floral Inhabitants



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Depending on where you live, this is a specific regional garden design. New gardeners should contact their local agricultural extension office or research reference garden books to determine which native flowering plants can easily survive in a specific area.

Though a general concept, your first guideline is identifying your location's hardiness zone. Most reference gardening books and websites display maps of these hardiness zones based on the lowest recorded environmental temperature. These zones are helpful as a quick climatic guide for plant survivability but not for your home garden's specific needs. For example, is your garden located in a more

arid or wet location? Soil conditions significantly affect whether a plant can survive during the growing season.

Native plants are genetically adapted to survive well, unlike non-native plants that can (and usually do) perish due to being too tender. Many cold climates located in lower hardiness zones also have soil conditions that reliably dry out (as described in drought-tolerant conditions listed in the previous section). Conversely, your location may be more prone to wetter conditions. These conditions fine-tune where certain “temperature-hardy” garden plants can survive for more than a year.

One easily overlooked aspect, and even more vital for plant survivability, is where your flower garden is precisely located. Is it exposed to more sunlight or shade? Reference books will not determine this for you, but your observation and determination are needed. Orient your direction first on where your garden is, or will be, located. Determine south; you can imagine where the sun’s ark from east to west will be highlighted in the garden. If not many tall trees or buildings cast shadows, then most of the garden will be bathed in sunlight. If there is more shade, then plan to include more shade-tolerant plants.

Based on general facts like regional hardiness zones, increasingly specific facts on soil characteristics, garden location, and sun-to-shade values should give you a ballpark determination of which flowering plants can grow and thrive in your garden. For Heaven's sake, this sounds like some horrendous mathematical equation to solve. To retain your sanity, save time, and limit the expense of purchasing needed plants, consult the experts in your immediate agriculture extension office and inquire about what bulbs, perennials, shrubs, and trees can reasonably assure survivability in your garden.

One major exception is annuals since they will bloom quickly but last only until a killing frost. No matter what your climate dictates, Thank goodness for our annual flowers. You can reliably expect an outstanding display no matter how short their lifespan will be in your location.

A Rocking Rock Garden

Floral Hangouts For Rockhounds



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Some people (obviously non-gardeners) consider this garden theme a misnomer. The idea of a garden is to grow flowering plants, not to collect rocks. Well, that is understandable.

When I operated a small flower nursery eons ago, my father served customers briefly. At the same time, I had to visit the bank. Upon my arrival back at the nursery, he informed me that a lady customer had shown up and inquired about what he recommended for a rock garden. Dad told me he was somewhat surprised about this question and answered the customer with his understanding. He advised her to walk around the farm fields and choose whatever rocks she could find. He

also told her they were all free. The lady stared at him, mumbled something incoherent (Dad was hard of hearing), and promptly left.

My retort to Dad was “heated” for him losing a potential good customer. My response to his help saddened him, and I regretted my reaction. It occurred to me that he did not understand what a rock garden was or what to plant in it. After a cooling-off period on my part, I asked if he was confused by her question, and he said he was. *“I was not joking with her, for I thought she was interested in obtaining rocks, not flowers. What a damn weird request!”*

Yes, the classification of a rock garden is very confusing. But my father was not far off the mark in advising this customer where to look for lots of rocks—my apologies to my late Dad for the confusion and my frustration. Developing a rock garden begins with collecting rocks – from small stones to making pathways to placing huge boulders in strategic areas as highlights to selected ornamental plants. In some cases, these boulders are the showstoppers based on their size, placement, overall design of the planned garden, and beauty. Their selection and placement are of primary concern, while the plants are the last to be considered.

Forming a rock garden is far easier when no other beds or borders are established. You begin by transforming part of a lawn into an area that will accept the rocks of your choice. For the placement of huge boulders, it is easier for a landscaping crew to haul the mega-ton rocks to their final placement when no other physical or botanical obstructions are in the way. The key word here is final; once placed, this is where it lies until a new glacier arrives in several thousand years.

Speaking of a landscaper crew, hire a company; this is not a weekend do-it-yourself project, even if no large rocks are involved. If you plan to redesign an established bed or border by adding rocks... well, expect some significant messing-up of the entire area. I must re-iterate – hire an excellent landscaping business that may specialize in forming this garden design.

If your budget is flexible, chip in the cost of constructing fountains and a small pond for koi fish. Or, if you're not into water features, add statues or sculptures like those of ancient Greece or Rome. Be careful of those nudes; the neighbors might have a massive hissy fit.

After establishing the final rock placements and pouring additional sand, gravel, and topsoil for the beds and borders, including pathways, you can start planning the plants you will grow and their placement.

Since the soil will be very porous and have excellent drainage, your best planting strategy is with drought-tolerant flowering plants (especially native plants to your area) and small shrubs or evergreen trees. Since this garden style is considered (by many rock-collecting gardening homeowners) to be easy to maintain—albeit with the occasional weed to be pulled—it makes sense to plant easy-to-maintain and hardy flowers. Check with your local agricultural agency for the ideal plants for your area.

The ever-present question is, why bother going to all this expense and labor (trouble is always included at no charge) to develop this type of flower garden style? The answer is that it is a unique style or expression of relaxing gardening. Not many people add huge boulders and statuary to flower beds, and the look is surprisingly tranquil and soothing, especially in this chaotic and disturbing world we constantly experience.

The Pollinators' Smorgasbord Garden

Fuel For Living Aircraft



There has been a lot of talk and published articles concerning growing more flowers that attract the pollinating actions of bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Of all the various garden displays you can develop, this type should be part of your overall plans. If you have space for at least one bed, please create one to attract the neighborhood bees and butterflies. If you live where hummingbirds and Monarch butterflies migrate, raise some high-nectar-producing flowers (preferably those with red tubular blossoms for the “hummers.”)

Interest in attracting all pollinators has increased recently. This concerns the steady decrease in their population and observation in our gardens and the wild. The decline is uncertain, but most agree it is

related to environmental problems like pesticides, habitat loss, and depletion of food sources.

Several flowers (especially those native to your area, thus a good reason to develop a native plant garden described above) can attract and increase the population of these pollinators. You can easily purchase these plants in nurseries and garden centers. You can grow them from seed if you are a more experienced gardener.

What would the world be like without the beauty of butterflies fluttering above beds of colorful flowers or being amazed at the shimmering feathers and avionic skills of hummingbirds? These pollinators are “flying art” to admire and wonder at. Are they less valuable in our attempt to preserve and enhance their numbers? The answer is a definite no!

What can you plant in this specific garden? The simplistic answer is anything you can sow and grow! For bees and butterflies, several composite-type flowers, from Asters to Zinnias, are available to attract them. These daisy-based-looking flowers provide a simple way for them to suckle high-calorie nectar and rest after extensive flying. Some blossoms are circular but still provide a stable structure to hold on to.

Wildflowers may not be as colorful as the vibrant hybrid strains offered each year in catalogs and garden centers. Still, they are “bee and butterfly-approved” in the quantity and quality of pollen and nectar. It’s time to allocate some garden space for them.

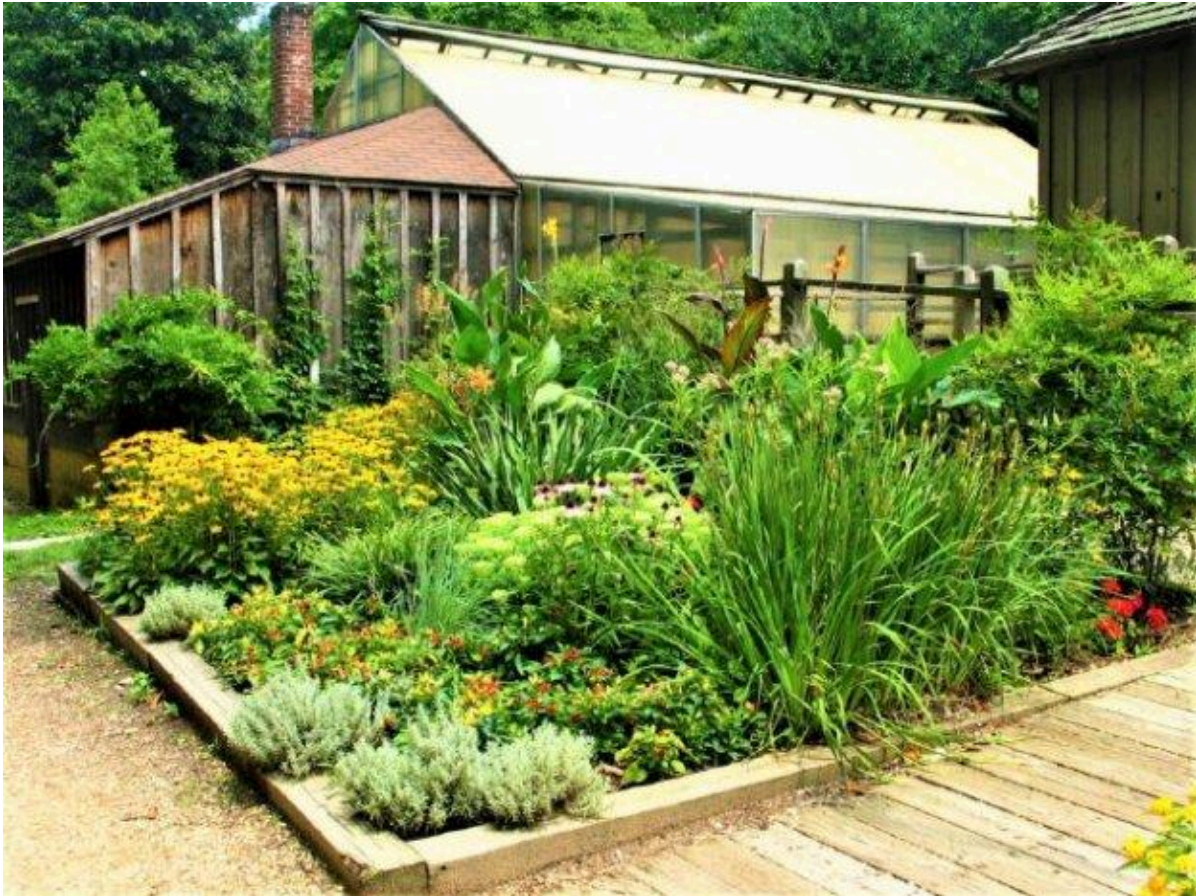
Please limit the number of hybrids and multi-petaled flowers you plan to grow in your garden. Single-petaled flowers offer bees and butterflies more pollen and make it easier for them to drink nectar. Offer more blue, purple, yellow, orange, and white flowers of different species and varieties. Bees are more attracted to these colors and prefer to stay in an area to feed instead of flying here and there to search for other flowers. Don’t limit it to only summer-blooming plants but to all-growing season accessibility.

Several commonly found garden plants will also attract hummingbirds, ensuring they will visit your garden and stay in your area longer throughout the summer.

Suppose you live in the southwestern locations of the United States. In that case, you have many native flowers that your various hummingbird species find irresistible. Please check with your local garden centers to identify those native plants to include in your gardens. Your birds will hum a tune of gratitude.

A Raised Bed Flower Garden

Elevating Your Flower Displays



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Why not copy the popular raised bed vegetable gardening method by substituting flowers instead of tomatoes and peppers? Oh dear, that would be sacrilegious, wouldn't it? Should a raised bed be prepared for Kale or Cosmos? Well, it is a thought, especially if you have a smaller area to incorporate flower beds.

Smaller homesteads may not have a supersized lawn surrounding flower beds but have gravelly areas instead. Formation of inground beds here is impractical – if not physically impossible – but if you borrow the concept of constructing large raised beds for planting

vegetables, you can substitute plenty of flowers. Or, experience both worlds by growing vegetable plants intermixed with flowers.

Like most raised bed gardening methods, the initial cost of lumber, nails, soil (including soilless mix,) and labor can be steep. Hiring a landscaper business may be more expensive. Still, the workers can have all materials readily at hand, and (unlike my incompetent building experience) they can provide better and longer-lasting results in construction.

Your raised beds will be limited in what flowering plants grow and thrive. For cold-climate locations, perennials and bulbs will not survive being frozen. Southern locations experiencing less or no deep freeze weather will get by dependably well. When in doubt about what to plant, always depend on sowing plenty of annuals to provide a fabulous summer and fall show.

An Elegant Container Garden

Going To Pot In An Attractive Way



Not everyone interested in flower gardening has extensive beds and borders to plant many types of flowers. What if your enthusiasm for this activity and lack of growing space conflict? What can you do to remedy this sad situation? One popular method is transforming your dull outdoor relaxation area into superb elegance with container gardening. Don't settle for a few pots or planters – think BIG and provide plenty of pots to provide all sorts of flower combinations of differing sizes and colors, as well as vertical gardening with hanging baskets and varying heights.

Why settle with only outdoor furniture when you can add planters, pots, and hanging baskets filled with decorative, low-maintenance, and

unusual flowers? These long-blooming plants not only provide fantastic season-long floral and leaf displays, but they also enhance your relaxation and outdoor entertainment appeal.

You can purchase most of the following annual plants in larger garden centers. Some are unique varieties that are vegetatively propagated, while others can be seed-grown and found in seed catalogs or websites. They are easy to sow, grow, and transplant into various containers by late spring or early summer.

Be creative and experience the joy of transforming your dull outdoor living space into an area of enjoyment, serenity, and comfort by growing the following plants. Creating this ever-blooming spectacle is not simply filling a pot with bagged soilless mix and plopping in some garden center transplants. There is an “art” to achieving a bountiful and healthy display of any flowering plant.

Container gardening involves more thought, labor, and management than bed and border gardening. Potted outdoor plants need daily attention. It’s all about the type of plants you raise, their light requirements, the size of the containers, and the quality of the soilless medium you fill them with.

Containers come in all sizes, shapes, and materials. Plastic pots are the most common, along with the old standby favorites, such as brick-colored clay pots. These pots are more porous, providing the roots with air but, conversely, allowing more water to escape from the soil. Therefore, they need more attention to watering.

Hypertufa planters are attractive and highly versatile. These hand-molded containers are made of concrete mixed with perlite. Check your local library for excellent books on constructing these unusual and decorative small to large planters.

Drainage holes are essential for all containers and hanging baskets. Never choose a container without seeing if the bottom has at least one hole to allow excess water to escape. The number of holes should increase with the container’s diameter.

A rule of thumb is that the larger the container, the better for plant development and bloom. However, there is a trade-off due to weight concerns. Hanging baskets filled with soil can become heavy, so ensure the attached end supports the weight.

The soilless mix does not contain true earth loam. Instead, it contains peat moss, vermiculite, perlite, sand, tree bark, and charcoal for added texture, drainage, and fertility. Avoid mixing it with clay-based garden soil, which forms a rigid substrate (like concrete) when dry.

Regular soil fertilization is also vital to promoting exceptional leafy and flower growth. Depending on your climate, every other watering should include a dilute fertilizer solution. One easy way to maintain soil fertility is to add some time-release fertilizer granules to or on the soil surface. This way, your containers and hanging baskets will always receive a boost of nutrition at each watering.

Using plants adapted to the sunny or shady conditions where you place a container, you will eventually transform a dull area into an ideal botanical spot where you can spend many hours of contentment.

Don't have space for any beds or limited border size? If possible, plant flowering vines in containers. When horizontal garden space is severely restricted, grow something vertically. All gardens are fabulous when adding height by using vines and climbing plants. They will need extra work to manage, but the results of beautiful flowers are worth it. Take your time to determine which vines to grow. Learn as much about them as possible. The more you know, the more you will grow these fantastic and beautiful plants.

No matter how these plants climb, such as by long stems or twining tendrils, they need support from other structures, such as shrubs, small trees, fences, trellises, or pergolas.

Although gardening with containers is more expensive and requires more maintenance than bed or border plantings, you will realize you are closer to the profound beauty of each flower. Isn't it worth every

penny and the labor to experience this pleasure each day? Yes, it certainly is.

A Fabulous Foliage Garden

Sheets Of Beautiful Pigments



Why should flowers have all the attention and prestige in a garden? Why not colorful leaves? Add several attractive bedding and border leafy plants to any flower garden. There are several variegated or colorful plant foliage available to a home gardener. No matter which flowering annual, perennial, shrub, or tree you can grow, at least one representative displays colorful foliage all season.

Most leaves are colored due to the concentration of a mixture of pigments, such as carotene and red lycopene, which give deep yellow, red, or orange colors, and xanthophyll, which displays bright yellow. The green photosynthesis colorant chlorophyll remains within the tissues but is more prevalent in younger leaves. As the leaves enlarge

and age, the chlorophyll is overlaid by these colorful pigments. How bright the color becomes depends on soil pH, fertility, moisture, air temperature, and the relative age of the plant.

You can landscape your beds and borders with plants having pleasantly gaudy foliage. Some display white or yellow variegations on leaf edges, bold splotches within each leaf, or vivid contrasting vein coloration. Other plants have multi-colored geometric designs and specific red, purple, black, yellow, and silvery-white foliage.

Variegated plants have always been beloved for flower gardens. They are incredible beauties, especially valuable when the flowers are not blooming. Several varieties are available to gardeners in garden centers and smaller nurseries. Others are rare and can be found online.

Do you want your flower garden to become incredibly gorgeous and your neighbors envious? The overall effect of growing several similar variegated plants in a garden can be striking, for they appear to brighten a more subdued or visually lethargic area. Adding leaf margins splashed with yellow or white draws your eyes to them, while the regular green-leafed plants become less noticeable.

Some garden plants have gone “wild and crazy” in displaying three or more contrasting colors within their leaves. Some green areas may exist, but several blended colors occupy most leaf real estate. Many flaunt themselves in excessive brilliance and vividness — and no one seems to mind. Hey, the more color, the better! Sometimes, their flowers — being pretty for sure — pale in comparison to the outstanding complex coloration of their leaves. Coleus plants are an excellent example of this wild coloration.

Some plants have ventured into the dark side of gardening, limiting the spectrum to only one shade of color. The leaf colors are primarily red to garnet, purple, and “almost” black shades. Some plants appear black in shadier locations while looking deep garnet in bright sunshine. These dark-colored plants attract immediate attention when planted alongside yellow to silvery-white leafy plants. Let’s say “vice versa,” for

the dark varieties will also highlight these other colorful leaves. In most cases, it is the foliage that steals the show!

Then, there are garden plants that radiate pure yellow or the richness of gold in their leaves. Usually, the plant starts green, especially when the foliage is young, but matures to chartreuse or pure yellow. Other plants are the reverse, while some begin and end as yellow. Oh, whatever — bright yellow leaves are eye-catching and valuable to brighten any garden.

Most of these plants prefer to grow in full sun, making the leaves more brilliant yellow. The yellow coloration in these plants causes differing reactions among people when viewed in a garden. Some people are pleasantly “wowed” by the incredible brightness, while others become repulsed by mistakenly thinking the plants are diseased or suffer from mineral deficiencies.

To calm visitor concerns into thinking you are a lousy gardener by growing sickly plants, don't plant yellow-leafed plants singly. Instead, grow several plants of the same type or other yellow plants together in a larger setting.

Add contrasting dark-leafed plants next to these yellow-leaf plants to impress skeptical visitors. Displaying contrasting leaf colors, textures, and sizes provides instant garden appeal and establishes you as a top-notch gardener.

Mother Nature constantly demonstrates an equal and opposite reaction to every action. If some plant foliage is dark, there has to be some displaying brightness. If some leaves resemble red-hot embers, others will be polar white. Better bundle up, for there will be a chill in the summer garden when growing these visually frosted delights.

Of all the non-green colorations of leaves described earlier, these plants are the most popular (based on nursery sales) for displaying contrasting leaf colorations in a garden. They provide a stunning contrast to other leaf colorations and with their flowers. They are explicitly appealing when combined with darker-leaf plants. These

plants have a white or bluish sheen, waxy, or “furriness” to their leaves. This fur extension, trichomes, arises from the leaf surface’s epidermis. The whole leaf is green, but the wax cuticle and trichomes scatter light, making the plant appear gray or white.

Botanists observed that an increase in the thickness, quantity, and length of these extensions corresponds to an increase in whiteness. Depending on genetics and under the best conditions, some plant species can achieve a bright metallic silver based on the density or thickness of the epidermal wax.

Variegated and multi-colored plants look more stunning when they contrast pleasantly with complementary or matching colors. Growing these eye-catching plants will make your garden a masterpiece all summer and fall.

A Goth-Inspired Garden

Pleasant Shades Of Noir



This flower gardening style combines the lifestyle of *The Addams Family* with Edgar Allen Poe's writings. It's all about discovering that petal and leaf darkness is beautiful and delightfully shocking.

Goth is the abbreviation for the Gothic style of architecture, art, and literature from the 12th to 18th centuries. This style embraced a radical, darker expression of cultural thought and creativity. This dark subculture of ideas and moods continues today, based on "going against the grain" of standardized or contemporary beliefs and practices.

Eventually, flower gardening got roped into this subculture and has developed a cult following everywhere. Please understand that this

form of flower gardening is not based on occult or nefarious practices. It is based on changing your perspective from growing colorful flowers to those having darker shades.

You must realize that nature does not produce true-black flowers. As mentioned in the above Foliage Garden section, many plants, be it their leaves or petals, produce dark red or garnet, deep purple, and “almost” black shades. What appears black in shady locations will look blackish-garnet in bright sunshine.

The Goth style is a relatively recent creation of all the various flower garden styles gardeners can develop. Flower varieties have always sported blackish blossoms and leaves but were usually considered unwanted developments. Gardeners were skeptical about including them in their gardens, thinking they were “ugly” or as a sign of being unhealthy. Times change, as do gardeners (including myself) who have steadily embraced unusually colorful botanical varieties within the past few years.

In a political sense, we have become more liberal in our gardening behavior. This is ideal, for experimenting with growing different flower styles and colors makes gardening exciting, if sometimes challenging. We will always have our rainbow of flower and leaf colors (described above). Still, many of us cannot resist something unique.

Breeders have reciprocated this new trend by selecting and offering several near-black plants for garden centers. Most, if not all, are presented as young propagated plants and not via seeds. Because of complex genetics, seed generations cannot pass along these unique colorations.

Like most of the gardening styles described in this ebook, it is impossible to recommend various varieties of plants that display more profound dark leaves or flowers. It is getting to the point where no matter what the plant is, it has at least one prime candidate for near-black coloration. Check your local garden center or peruse the several seed and website nurseries, and you will find many varieties waiting to grow in your eyebrow-raising gothic garden.

A Fabulous Fragrance Garden

It Makes Scents To Establish One



Just imagine right now a well-stocked flower garden, ablaze with vivid colors in midsummer, that includes one crucial feature — sweet, alluring fragrances. Most of those perfumes are enjoyed by smelling the blossoms close-up. However, some plants generously release those aromas into the still air.

You may not realize it, but several garden plants have varying degrees of scent. Plant them in your beds or borders, and use them in containers to increase your enjoyment on patios and decks. Enjoy all those heavenly fragrances anywhere you spend your days and evenings (described in the next garden plan section). Think of all the pleasurable possibilities!

Each season brings its tempting perfumes, starting with spring-blooming bulbs and continuing with summer treats from various annuals, perennials, shrubs, and young trees.

It is not only floral scents that generate smiles but also several leafy herbs. Make sure to plant containers of peppermint or spearmint and eucalyptus so you can brush your hands across them from time to time. Like those mints, scented geraniums also offer fantastic fragrances. Pluck a few leaves and carry them within your pocket for occasional pick-me-ups in attention. You can also never go wrong planting beds of lavender, sages, rosemary, and thyme.

If you wish to specialize in one specific garden plant, you cannot go wrong in developing a fragrant rose garden. Where can you begin when choosing which roses to plant? Allow your nose to be the judge. Make sure to grow only those that are hardy for your general area, preferably have long blooming, few thorns (or none at all), and those that will fit nicely within your garden dimensions.

How can you not include plantings of lilacs, lilies, honeysuckle, and sweet peas? Never to be ignored are more tender or tropical plants such as jasmine and gardenias.

There are plenty of plants to choose from specifically for fragrance. Several can be raised from seed, while others can be located in garden centers.

A Romantic Moonlight Garden

Drifting In The Sea Of Tranquility



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While many fragrant flowers prefer blooming during the day, some fantastic plants wait until after sunset to open their white petals and possibly release alluring fragrances. These vespertine plants grow well in full to partial sunlight, either in a bed or border. You can easily move about container-grown plants if you have a patio or deck. They may look rather unexciting by day, but the magic happens in the dark and continues until morning.

Plant white or pale-yellow annuals, perennials, shrubs, and flowering bulbs in your beds or borders. For springtime enjoyment, view white daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, lilacs, and native dogwood trees. Plant white

hydrangeas, towering delphiniums, petunias, nicotianas (ornamental tobacco), and mega-fragrant tuberose for summer and fall night attractions.

For an extra thrill, grow the biennial yellow-flowered *Oenothera Evening Primrose* "Tina James." This variety slowly opens its petals right before your eyes. This show begins at dusk and continues each night for several weeks.

These flowers (and many more) reflect whatever evening light (moonlight, house lights, or decorative lighting) to brighten small garden areas. Surround yourself with these flowers while you gaze at the ultimate grandeur of the universe above you. Soothe your mind before bedtime by being surrounded by your evening flowers.

Moonlight and romance go hand-in-hand when you create a flower garden specifically enjoyed by nightfall. Subtle to pervasive fragrances will linger in the still, cool air while various moths flutter from blossom to blossom. If you are fortunate enough to live in North America, you may glimpse the ultra-beautiful Luna Moth (*Actias luna*) with its large pale green wings. You may have to contend with a few mosquitoes but don't let this irritant interfere with you and a loved one. Spend some time in the beauty of this nighttime dreamy garden.

A Children's Flower Garden

Good Enough For Adults, Too!



This garden theme is focused on a child's perspective. To children, a flower is a flower, not based on specific varieties or species. If the blossoms are pretty and plenty to pick, it is much easier for a child to become interested in gardening.

Childhood gardening is about learning and enjoying flowers, vegetables, creepy-crawly insects, and toads. The more children observe them, the more they may want to know. Teaching children about gardening stimulates their interest in the natural world around them.

Let's face it: gardening is boring for children. But, there are ways to interest a child in all the strange plants and animals in their backyards. I once heard a lecturer say, "*Get children interested in growing flowers, and you prevent them from a life of crime.*" I don't know if that is accurate, but it makes sense. After all, I haven't got a police record – yet.

This style of flower gardening focuses on using flowers as a primer to get children actively interested in nurturing and learning about plants. Try to select unusual and fascinating flowers, especially those that are easy to grow, including those with fragrances. Encourage a child to develop an interest in strange insects and animals. I feel these areas will help stimulate a child's interest in gardening. They will also give them a happy excuse to get their hands dirty, which will do them a world of good!

Children are born gardeners. They have an eye for beauty, a curious mind, and a willingness to learn about the world around them. Then something silly happens. They grow up and lose these qualities. Why? It could be because we adults quickly lose that interest, and we try to make children grow up too fast. Children need to grow up at their own speed.

A child's first experience in a garden should be memorable. Getting them excited is challenging, so we must find inspiration. The garden can be big, weird-looking, or easy to grow. Maybe it is all the different insects that live there.

Give them fun reasons to be in a garden. Go outside with them, look at a butterfly's wings with a magnifying lens, and show them how to sow, grow, and harvest vegetables. Show them that work can be fun while being in a garden. Well, hoeing and pulling weeds is stretching that "fun" part. Let's bypass that activity for now.

A garden is a big classroom. Please take the time to instruct a child about nature. Help them develop a green thumb and be proud of this life-changing accomplishment. It happened to you and me—hopefully, it will happen to them.

For younger children (and young-in-heart adults) who are not currently in the learning phase but retain a rich imagination spiced with magic, consider constructing a portion of a bed or border into a fairy habitat. Collect small, colorful stones, miniature houses, and animal figurines to add the right ambiance. Try to grow garden flowers that attract daytime butterflies and evening blooming white flowering plants to attract shy, secretive moths. The addition of small solar lights will enhance moth attraction and overall evening mysticism.

Made in the Shade Garden

Luminosity In The Shadows



There may be shady characters lurking about in your garden. Well, let's hope these characters are plants—especially ones with beautiful flowers. There is a misconception that all shade gardens contain only green leafy plants such as Hostas and ferns. If any colorful flowers are blooming, they have to be Impatiens. No, many other colorful plants and flowers will brighten any shady garden area. These shadowy types are easily found in many garden centers and nurseries.

One of the most confusing issues in flower gardening concerns shade. How much shade can certain plants tolerate or adequately require for best growth and blooming? We don't consider how much brightness sun-loving plants need. But how much less light is adequate for a plant

to be planted in shady conditions? Sun-loving flowering plants can grow in partly shady areas if they get “enough” bright sunlight for most of the day. The problem with raising plants in the shade is determining how much light and its duration they require.

For the sake of simplicity, several plants can grow and prosper in bright, diffuse, or partially shady locations. They can tolerate the sun for a short part of the day—ideally in the early morning sun—or have dappled sunlight shining through trees or shrubs. Few plants grow well in constant, deep shade. All shade plants require diffuse lighting and grow best when not planted in the full intensity of the sun during the afternoon.

You can include many spring-blooming bulbs or other plants with minimal bloom time. Botanists call many of these plants ephemerals; they bloom quickly, set seed, and then go dormant for the rest of the year — all before the tree leaves fully expand. They are lovely growing in the early spring woodland, soaking in full sunlight before the area becomes dark from the expanding canopy of tree leaves. By all means, learn more about these amazing plants and include them in your shade garden.

Several reference books are available on creating a shade garden if your area receives constant sunlight. You will be surprised how wooden structures like pergolas, lath houses, or rows of trellises can block enough sunlight to allow shade plants to thrive. Build these structures large enough so you, family members, and friends can have a serene retreat from summer’s intense sun and heat.

Let’s also not forget the orientation of your house or property. We all have a north-side area of a home or building where nothing grows except green weeds. Take the time to improve the soil with added fertile topsoil, compost, and mulch. You can grow many plants that can tolerate deeper, shady conditions but still bloom and grow well.

You must also determine if your shade plants will grow in dry or moist soil. Woodland gardens may have dry soil most of the time due to the surrounding trees absorbing rainwater quickly. You may need to add

mulch or humus to the ground or install irrigation hoses to help recharge soil moisture. Shade plants that require moist soil will never thrive here. They will wilt and eventually die. Some shade plants love moist soil, but never in soggy or boggy conditions.

Gardening in shady areas does not have to be confusing or discouraging. It is a learning process, but you will create the colorful garden you envision for those shadowy areas around your home. Take off your sunglasses and transform the dark space of your garden into one of color and, surprisingly, filtered brightness.

A Cut-Flower Garden

Bringing Outdoor Beauty Indoors



There is an art and science behind the simple act of cutting flowers and placing them in a vase of water. What we should enjoy outdoors is now deliberately sacrificed to spend its remaining days of beauty confined

indoors. Let's call it a transformation of pleasure from the outdoor enjoyment of nature to the confines of our shelter away from nature.

This gardening style emphasizes growing flowers that can be cut repeatedly during the growing season. While they bloom in the garden, you can also enjoy them in your house.

Many garden flower bulbs develop one stem, such as tulips, daffodils, lilies, gladiolus, and others. Cutting them and leaving only green stems and leaves in the garden is rather unsightly, if not sad. Allowing them to bloom only in your garden will provide longer-lasting enjoyment. If you wish, cut a few representatives for the house but leave most for the outdoor display.

Which type of flowering plants have the greatest potential for repeat blooming in the garden and repeat cutting for indoor displays?

Consider referencing the above Pollinators' Smorgasbord Garden section for clues on which plants to sow or purchase. Flowers grown for butterflies (especially composite annuals) have the most potential for long blooming. By periodic cutting of these flowers, newer ones are constantly being replaced. Some perennial plants (like roses) can also have a few repeat blooms, unlike the rapidity and abundance of annual plants.

Picking or cutting flowers to make bouquets has had a lengthy history. At some point, someone discovered that placing them in a container of water extended flower freshness and enjoyment. Artists depicted idealized flower displays in still-life paintings and the occasional obligatory fruit bowls.

Modern times depict cut flowers as ultra-stylistic home decorations set as impressive backdrops. Like in those paintings, we overdo the displays to the point of mass confusion. There is too much clutter and too many wavelengths of color to comprehend with our eyes. For me, a vase full of complimentary colorful roses or two sunflowers is more comfortable to view and enjoy.

We plant many varieties of flowers but neglect to enjoy them more, especially in a garden. Cut flowers bridge that gap in appreciating their detailed beauty. Indoors, we can admire each blossom's construction, color, fragrance, and texture.

Ever since human hands first held a bouquet of colorful petals, flowers have been agents for enriching our lives. Growing and enjoying re-blooming flowers for cutting will bring tranquility to your garden, house, and heart.

A Stimulating Sensory Garden

Therapeutic Awareness



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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle based his Sherlock Holmes stories on Holmes's outstanding power of observation. In the short story "*A Scandal in Bohemia*," Holmes gives his clueless companion, Dr. Watson, constructive criticism when viewing a crime scene. "*You see, but you do not observe.*" How does this quote apply when enjoying garden flowers? It's elementary, my dear reader; we don't observe them closely but give them a passing glance.

It is seeing flowers and using your four other senses to appreciate the complete beauty of a garden. This Sensory Garden theme combines all the different themes described in this ebook. It does not matter how

organized or disorganized a bed or border is; we must use all five senses to enjoy what a garden of flowers offers us.

Let's start with the first and most apparent sense – sight. Color (or, usually, several colors) is our first attraction, followed by the general shape, bloom size, and the number of flowers on each plant. Your mind instantly decides whether it is agreeable based on your preferences. Your mind, at some point, determines the identification of that flower. Other sights include the activity of pollinating insects, such as bees and butterflies humming and fluttering from flower to flower. And what can be said about witnessing the quick darting of a hummingbird? You might be fortunate to have one levitating in the air near you!

The following sense is smell. Smelling flowers is primarily based on age, which I discovered by observing my nursery customers. When presented with a flower, children will first look at it and then smell it to determine if it has a fragrance. If it does, the child will always respond with a smile.

Conversely, adults go with sight and neglect to put their noses to the flower. I recommend that they smell it and appreciate the fragrance. It never failed! Strangely, their reaction was not with a smile or appreciative smiles but with a non-cache attitude: “...yeah, it does, but can I plant it in the shade?”

Granted, each person's sense of smell differs, but why have adults lost that extra enjoyment while a child seems to express innately? As the adage says, “*Take time to smell the roses.*” Strive to add lovely, smelly flowers to your garden and make plenty of smiles.

The following sense to appreciate in a flower garden is touch. Your fingers are sensitive to the contrasting degree of textural sensations from soft to hard, silky smooth to rough, fluid to solid, sharpness to blunt, and cold to hot. A garden can represent the velvety feel of flower petals, the sharpness of rose thorns, the furriness or sandpaper texture of leaves, the roughness of tree bark, the grittiness of sand or stones, and the coolness of damp soil.

All that “touchy-feely” stuffy sounds ridiculous and blatantly obvious. Still, of all we touch throughout the day, we don’t think about those sensations. The next time you handle a flower, feel those soft petals and crinkly leaves. When transplanting or sowing seeds, feel the moist and cool earth. Feel how crumbly the soil is when rubbed between your fingers. Gardening begins with handling the plants, soil, and water.

The following sense is taste, which is more delegated to a vegetable garden than a flower garden. Your vegetable garden relies more on sight and taste, not so much in the garden, but for a kitchen. For flower gardens, taste should be attached to a health warning, like the US Surgeon General issuing a possible statement, that tasting flowers, roots, and leaves may be (and, in most cases, is) hazardous to your health.

Most of our tasty morsels come from bonafide herbs, which act as intermediaries between the garden and the kitchen. Some herbs, such as mints and sages, are great companions for containers placed strategically for visual and olfactory enjoyment. Pluck a mint leaf and chew to enjoy mouth-freshening ecstasy.

Most of our flower garden taste enjoyment will come from fruit trees. Who can resist biting into a juicy summer-ripened peach or an autumnal crisp apple? These and other fruits begin with experiencing their beautiful and fragrant blossoms.

Our final sense, hearing, is more elusive but, at the same time, ever-present. You can’t hear a flower, only what is around it. Sound is produced from numerous activities around your vicinity. The wind blows, swaying the tree leaves, and the humming of insects such as bees and crickets while birds chatter in various musical dialects. You can install water fountains or pools to hear the hypnotic trickle or splash.

In one of my ebooks, I joked about incorporating musical instruments into your flower garden. I have always equated music with flowers and vice versa. Every age, culture, and generation contributes unique vocal and instrumental gifts to all listeners.

Adding music would be excellent for any garden. Since everyone carries smartphones nowadays, you can have instant access to music. I once knew someone who installed an underground series of wires connected to strategically placed waterproof speakers within a large garden. Inside the house, a connected CD player supplied classical music. The effect was truly magical!

You can make your garden simple or extravagant. It's your choice on how to showcase your creation. If you could add an extra sense, that would be contentment. The whole idea of any garden is to reduce stress, calm your thoughts, and increase your overall mental health via your five senses.

You can find many garden-related objects within the aisles of garden centers, such as cement statues, metal works, and outdoor furniture. With outdoor solar lighting, you can extend your gardening enjoyment well into the evening — until the mosquitoes make you retreat indoors. Solar lights add a delightful ambiance to any garden setting for every season. They provide subtle illumination for pathways, seating, or highlighting night-blooming flowers. This idea is excellent for children's enjoyment in making a garden for fairies and fireflies. Adults can create a Shakespearean concept of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Plan to invite friends and family over for tea parties (or Jack Daniel's parties when you're really stressed out) while sitting near a table in wicker chairs. If zoning allows, add a firepit for sunset barbeques. All this added "bling" sets the mood for total relaxation among friends and family.

If you express euphoria within your Sensory Garden, let go of any inhibitions and enjoy dancing among the flowers.

An Edible Flower and Wellness Garden

What Ails You May Cure You Here



This garden style caters to those who enjoy growing flowers and love healthy eating and living. A flower garden that accomplishes all those prerequisites must have specific criteria based on our well-being.

All (or most) ornamental plants in this specific garden style are considered safe for human health and well-being. All the other garden themes listed in this ebook will have plants with life-threatening reactions. The important lesson is to ensure a plant is safe to eat.

Many popular flowering plants are poisonous, and some can be accidentally eaten if grown with safe-to-eat plants. The common

denominator for developing this garden theme is absolute safety by growing non-toxic flowers.

If you develop this gardening theme, add it with or adjacent to a vegetable garden (in a separate or raised bed). Try to locate it close to a door leading to the kitchen for easy access and quick selection of the produce.

So, what can we grow that is pretty, yummy, and good for what ails us? Many common culinary herb plants are considered safe, attractive, and healthy. Several provide beautiful blossoms throughout the spring and summer. For our “regularly growing” flowers for all beds and borders, you can add their lovely blooms for festive salads and edible garnishes.

Noteworthy examples of popular culinary plants include calendula petals, violet blossoms, lavender, borage, chamomile leaves and blossoms, nasturtium, rose petals and hips, chives, cornflowers, and dandelions. For additional flair, you can include larger flowers like squash and Hemerocallis (daylily) unopened blossoms. There are several more, but I must reiterate: be sure what plant you are growing.

Several herbs and flowers have therapeutic qualities that may be useful for homeopathic remedies. Before consuming those plants, please consult your GP doctor if you are on prescribed medications. Some herbs will dangerously interact with certain medications. The Asteraceae family members, including daisies and chrysanthemums, are edible but can cause severe allergic reactions in people who suffer from ragweed sensitivities.

When all your edible flowers and herbs grow abundantly during the summer, you will face a perplexing dilemma — what can I do with all these plants? One of the great benefits of this garden theme is you can dry many of the petals and herbs. Doing so allows you to store these edible bits and pieces to add to recipes later, especially in the fall and winter. Dried mint, Monarda (“bergamot”), and chamomile leaves (or blossoms) can become great relaxing teas; calendula petals add magnificent color to soups and casseroles, while several herbs can

become outstanding “no-salt” recipes additions. You can always package many of these dried plants to be presented as gifts.

A Riveting Rose Garden

A Few Thorny Issues May Arise



Finally, we arrive at the most desired and popular garden theme worldwide. What better way to highlight the pronounced beauty of the Queen of Flowers? All hail *Queen Rosa*! You would think the beds and borders of all homes would overflow with fragrant rose petals, but that is not realistic. Growing roses is not the easiest activity for most people. Still, the outlook looks rosier for a resurgence in popularity, especially for new gardeners growing newer roses.

Depending on your hardiness zone, many roses are exceptionally hardy and long-lived. This fact alone would be ideal for extensive planting. Still, long-standing problems are associated with most rose species and

varieties that...well...to say a worn-out pun... create “a thorn in one’s side” in growing, caring, and handling them for most people.

Several rose species and their varieties are notorious for harboring various fungal, viral, and insect diseases and infestations. One common fungal malady is Blackspot, which causes the leaves to develop black spots and smudges. This is not fatal, but in severe cases, it causes the rose to lose most of its leaves and weaken the plant’s survivability. Less severe cases cause the plant to look like an extreme case of black-spotted measles. Other diseases, such as Powdery Mildew, coat the leaves like powdered flour or sugar.

Insects also cause havoc when eating leaves and, especially, flowers. The Japanese Beetle is a scourge in many areas—especially in my area—that can destroy the beauty of a rose flower within a few hours. Aphids, under extreme circumstances and populations, can suck up plenty of the sap, as well as spread generous amounts of viruses and bacterial infections. Granted, this happens with practically all other garden flowers, but roses seem to be a preferred victim.

Then, of course, are those prickly, pointy weapons of fingertip destruction, modified leaves called thorns. The Queen of Flowers may be universally adored, but she is known for inflicting pain and blood. I don’t think I need to explain why people (like careless me) are not especially keen on growing and caring for plenty of roses due to “their sharp arsenal.”

Another reason not to develop several rose beds is the diligent (aka painstaking) care required for them. Your first concern is finding hardy species and varieties in your location. That’s not a problem in warmer areas, but selections are limited in cold climates.

How tall and broad your choice of roses is also a significant concern. Old-fashion and some new-fashion hybrids have the potential to grow alarmingly tall and wide. Their flowers are gorgeous, but a bed full of them is unrealistic for modern suburban gardens. Unless you have purchased or inherited some English estate home like in *Downton Abbey*, go wild in planting them!

For us “regular folk,” one or two big-type spreading old roses may be acceptable. Fortunately, modern breeders have reduced the size of newer types but retained the large, billowy, and highly fragrant flowers. Choose the modern, less tall, and less spreading hybrids for better floriferous results in a rose bed.

One hugely popular series is the **Knockout Roses**, which bloom nonstop all season. Unlike the old-fashioned types, these roses may not be incredibly fragrant (breeders are working on that “problem”) but are exceptionally disease and pest-resistant – at least in my observation of a neighbor’s exceptional all-summer display.

Hybrid tea roses have always been popular but look more appealing in warmer climates than in colder areas. Here, where I live at the intersection of Tundra Street and Arctic Boulevard, hybrid tea roses grow, at best, as green sticks with a large flower at the top. Big Mart and “home improvement” stores sell thousands of these roses each spring. By growing them, I pity the poor souls with great expectations for a grand display. Conversely, they provide gardeners with the best growth and bloom in warmer climates.

Roses, whether old or new, fragrant or not, climbers or miniatures, will potentially develop plentiful blooms when the soil and light conditions are favorable. Treat them like any newly planted perennial, shrub, or tree with well-prepared, fertile, good-draining loam. Before purchasing, please do some homework on which species and varieties are well suited for your climate, especially your garden plot size and sunny location.

A Wildlife Habitat Garden

More Than Just Flowers To Enjoy



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Yes, this type of flower garden is probably (well, let's be honest and say "is") considered counterproductive since many gardeners would prefer to keep the larger herbiferous critters from looting and damaging your prized plants. Still, the occasional viewing of curious but timid deer, frantic squirrels, and rascally rabbits (*"What's up doc?"*) in a garden from your picture window can elicit a pleasurable surprise. If viewing a vegetable garden...well, that will usually make you express rage.

This garden theme is worth creating for those who value helping our fellow inhabitants. This theme would be best for more rural areas. Suburban (including interior town or city) gardens can cause

consternation or heated arguments from neighbors who disagree with you about attracting more deer, rabbits, raccoons, chipmunks, and birds. Please respect their opinions since these animals do not adhere to staying within your property lines.

If there are no immediate or future problems with your neighbors, the best part of creating this theme is that it incorporates all the other specific themes described in this ebook. You can modify these themes by enacting a few necessary tweaks and changes to become a sanctuary or respite area for your area's wildlife. These modifiers include providing adequate food, shelter, and water.

Flower gardens, unlike vegetable gardens, provide limited food resources depending on the wildlife in your area. Don't be surprised if the above-visiting animals nibble your prized perennials. But, if you are serious about creating a wildlife garden, your best response is not to plant rare plants but to plant common varieties. Better yet, it is best to plant wildflowers and ornamental grasses.

The most popular planting plan for this garden style involves attracting birds. For example, you can provide nectar-rich flowers to attract hummingbirds and expand your plantings to include flowers that produce plenty of seeds. These seeds attract several birds for fall and, especially, winter viewing.

Fruit trees and shrubs (like crab apples) are also essential to attract hungry avian visitors during the lean seasons of fall and winter. All gardens have a limited supply of food resources, but adding long-term feeding stations, such as bird feeders, can extend viewing pleasure for most of the year.

Adding adequate shelter is another important method to attract wildlife to any garden. The problem is "what kind of shelter?" One crucial component in creating adequate shelter concerns is downsizing your lawn. Yes, that pesky lawn issue described at the start of this ebook resurfaces again here. All wildlife hates open spaces that lawns display. Make sure to cut back on your lawn size, provide more trees

and shrubs, and several flower garden islands with varying plant heights.

Developing the above garden themes overlaid with this “basic” blueprint plan will provide hiding places and extra food resources. Home means different concepts for different types of wildlife. For example, trees and shrubs offer songbird nesting sites and hang extra nesting boxes to attract more bird species.

One additional major shelter concern, but one easily overlooked or realized, is keeping your pets, especially kitty cats, from roaming the gardens. Predation is a big problem for all birds, from chicks in nests to adult birds searching among the plants for insects to feed themselves and their chicks. Dogs also scare off deer, bunnies, and squirrels if allowed to roam free. For a vegetable garden, that is not a bad thing.

The most crucial requirement for attracting wildlife is reliably providing plenty of fresh water. This is especially important for gardeners living in severely cold or hot climates. Finding water is a significant concern for all wildlife, regardless of the temperature. In cold climates, water freezes, and many animals cannot find liquid water. Incorporating heated bird baths or pools into at least one garden will attract many thirsty critters, large and small.

In hot climates, pools rapidly evaporate, leaving areas high and dry for extended periods. Constructing small pools or ponds with automated float devices connected to an underground water hose or line from the house would be prudent. These devices can automatically turn on the water when they sense a drop in the water level and turn off when the predetermined water fill level is re-established.

You can always add colorful koi fish and frogs for larger permanent pools or small ponds. Who can resist the croaking of a frog or toad on a warm summer evening? That sounds delightful to me! That would make a combined Sensory Garden/Wildlife Garden project an ideal pleasurable undertaking.

Conclusion



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You can add more specific garden themes, like creating a Mediterranean, Japanese, desert, or tropical garden. But, when doing so, you must be sure those associated plants can grow well in your area. One of the most common errors all gardeners experience is growing sun-loving plants in a mainly shady area and vice-versa. Plants also require adequate water, soil pH, and fertility. Like shoe sizes are to people, not all plants enjoy the same conditions. Please study which plants will succeed in your garden's environmental conditions.

Everyone wants to create dazzlingly beautiful flowers for their home. The problem is, who has the time to sow, plant, and care for all those many flowering plants available for a home gardener? Can you afford to hire a grizzled English gardener plodding around with wheelbarrows,

wearing oversized Wellington boots? No? I can't afford one, either. Well, what can we do?

As a beginning home gardener, the solution is not expensive or overly complicated. The ideal plan is to grow certain low-maintenance perennials, annuals, and bulbs that, once planted, will grow well with less work and care from you.

Your busy life should not keep you from enjoying flowers' beauty and relaxing contentment. There are many flowers you can grow with minimal assistance. I want to say, "*plant them, water them, and forget about them,*" but that is not truthful. Spend time and a little work in making sure they are growing well. By giving them a proper place to live and grow, along with the occasional watering and upkeep, they will reward you with beauty but also with pride in doing something incredible.

Low maintenance and easy care are the most reassuring and goal-seeking qualities for a happy life in gardening. Still, it is not a "plant and forget about" activity. There is a problem with time—many people do not have the luxury of spending hours caring for the plants during the week. Spend a few minutes each weekend admiring the flowers, double-checking to water them if the soil is dry, and cutting off spent blooms.

Books and catalogs will instruct you which flowers establish quick and gorgeous blooms from spring until fall. Many plants are surprisingly low-care, but you must learn which ones to consider growing in your garden.

Try to create personal displays in your themed garden, where you can relax on a recliner and enjoy the sights and sounds of your own "secret garden." This area should be your retreat from your workday's day-to-day hectic trials and tribulations.

It seems the world's eyes are always on us via security and smartphone cameras, social media posts, and judgmental strangers (usually rudely commenting on such posts). Everyone should have personal space to

view the beauty of nature, flaunting colorful petals and wings, the sound of the breeze tousling wind chimes, or the nonelectric buzz of a bee. All distractions should be “OFF,” while all attractions should be “ON” for your senses.

Eventually, you may become bored with the constant offering of common flowering plants in nurseries or garden centers. You must gravitate toward finding unique and fascinating plants. Become an adventurous gardener and discover these new botanical treasures! Adding these intriguing plants stimulates our attention and curiosity. Searching for and growing unique garden flowers also makes gardening more entertaining.

Always remember, a good-looking garden makes any new gardener look professional. If all is well, sit in your comfortable lawn chair, sip an ice-cold drink, and admire your beautiful themed flower garden. Smile (aplenty) and congratulate yourself on a job well done.

Thank You for reading this ebook

I hope this publication has helped you discover variations of creating stunning flower gardens. One critical complaint you may have expressed while reading this ebook is that it does not include many examples of specific plants you can include in these garden themes. Please accept my apologies. Including so many flower descriptions would significantly extend the size of this publication.

The concept of this ebook was to generalize the different styles of creating beds and borders that could be used to display various flowers.

Please visit my author website, <https://gedwinvarner.com> for information concerning my other gardening ebooks. These publications describe specific plants for those garden themes in more detail. The websites also include contact information if you should have any comments or questions.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm, helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

He successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery for twenty years. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "Read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.