

Taste and Colour in the Rock Garden

Many gardeners are apt to be complacent and quite satisfied with their achievements if they have succeeded in growing a diversity of plants fairly well to me but it seems a pity and, to say the least, rather inadequate if the plants, which they have grown, are not shown off to their best advantage. In the rock garden particularly a greater number of plants must exist in closer proximity than anywhere else in the garden and the gardener must show himself to be an artist if a planting is to be successful. Rock garden planning differs from, say the planting of a shrub border, in that, while cultural considerations come first in both cases, form, outline and leafage are to be regarded with less importance than the colour of the flowers, ^{Nevertheless,} ^{the underplanting of shrubs} combinations of plants, such as carpeters over bulbs and ~~shade plants~~, can often be exploited, for instance the blue of muscari peering a pink mat of Alba subulata "Appleblossom", in addition to looking well, is culturally suitable, ^{should be chosen} choose the position, ^{first} then to suit requirements of culture and, if the worst comes to the worst, ^{placed} place the subject adjacent to plants which will be out of flower when it blooms, however, if any nearby plants do flower at a



similar time and are of a colour which will probably not blend or contrast, ^{must be looked for}
look for a new position site. Of course many of the most striking colour combinations are accidental but conversely two colours which clash will be a source of disappoint^{ment} and annoyance^{for years,}, especially if the plants are difficult to grow or move.

An unexpected ~~colour~~ discord of tones is usually struck by two plants of a similar hue flowering in close ^{together} proximity at the same time. An excellent, albeit extremely regrettable, example was a slide, shown ~~of~~ at a recent meeting, of a remarkably well-grown specimen of Stouglasia vitaliana along side some Narcissus bulbocodium, whose clear Portuguese sunshine had made the ~~made the~~ yellow of the former look quite mustardy.

^{when}
In the same way, two blues flower together, the purple in the duller one is always accentuated, ~~the~~. All this does not mean to say that a planned

association of shades will ~~not~~ invariably be a success, on the contrary ~~it~~ ^{often through} many well-thought out contrasts have been absolutely misfired, ~~and been~~ failure of the flowering seasons to overlap, ~~failure~~ but there are a few fairly reliable criteria when it comes to

placing, which may help in plan displaying a plant or preferably group of plants well. In the following paragraphs the examples given and the

conclusions drawn from them ~~are~~ ^{do} certainly not guarantee ~~of~~ ^{have} success but they ^{have} been effective in some gardens.

Blue and pink is usually a fairly reliable association, particularly if the blue is a pale one. The azure showers of Omphalodes cappadocica with the soft rose of Saxifraga umbrosa pinnuloides are delicately lovely in light, cool shade and again Chionodoxa lucillae in soft blue is delightful among the feet of camine and cream-headed Julipa kaufmanniana "The First". The complementary colours of blue and yellow are ^{also} an almost certainly successful contrast and never fail to emphasise each other's purity. I planted a sweep of Scilla siberica's gentian-blue under the branches of the brilliant variety of Toraythia intermedia, "Lynwood", and a startling blue and gold splash resulted, however the brightness might have been too much, if it had not been for the softening effect of several plants of the common primrose flowering nearby and among some of the scillas. These three plants provide a good example of ~~the culture~~ satisfying both cultural and aesthetic requirements at once: the foregoing not a fastidious plant, ~~provid~~ gives a little shade to both the other subjects, while all three flower at the same time. An ^{other} easy and pleasant harmony of blue and yellow for those rock-gardeners, who are not too fussy or strict, can be obtained by sowing the two Californian, sun-loving annuals, Lupinus nanus and ~~Eschsch~~ Eschscholzia californica, ~~together~~ near each other. The blue and white of the little lupin with the pale gold of the poppy could not be bettered. Similarly ^{an other} equally good and less obtrusive couple of Californians are Baby Blue Eyes, Nemophila ^{menziesii} insignis, and Cream Cups, Platystemon californicus.

Bright reds are not common among alpiners and are also rather difficult to place. Whereas blue and yellow, the two complementary colours, associate well, the complement of red is green. Consequently reds frequently show up best against a dark emerald background ^{therefore} ~~of~~ plants with ^{pendulous} ~~fine~~ foliage such as ferns and many of the taller Ericaceae can be made use of, as long as they do not flower at the same time and ^{they} like: the same conditions. Bright blue sometimes goes well with red and I recollect reading of the two ~~delphiniums~~ delphiniums, fluttering gentian-blue D. tatsienense and scarlet D. nudicaule, associating

well together. Reginald Tauxer mentioned a fine natural combination in "The English Rock Garden" on similar lines: $\frac{1}{2}$ electric blue Agilologia recta (syn. A. bestolonii) covering the ground between the sealing-wax red Turk's caps of Lilium pomponium both being backed and shaded by dark, little Pinus montana. But if a companion cannot be found for a bright red or any other dazzling bloom one can do no better than use a dark or silver leaved shrub as a back ground.

The use of silver leaves or white flowers is always effective and is excellent for tempering garish colours. Bright Alcea species are present a good appearance when pushing their sparkling goblets through ~~or quills~~ the silver quilt of Antennaria dioica tosea, in full spring sunshine. ~~A. J. Johnson, who always had a fine eye for colour,~~ White and pale yellow flowers can give the same result; for instance, the hard yet lovely tones of aubrieta can be modified by planting with pale Olyssum saxatile citrinum (not the ^{typical} species) or even biscuit-beige A. s. "Dudley Neville" in a limey, sunny place. A. J. Johnson, who always had a fine eye for colour, recommended placing the varnished scarlet of tall Lilium chalcedonicum against "the cool slate-green and white of Senecio montai".

The last combination gives rise to the fact that many associations of plants ~~are~~ not only give pleasure to the onlooker but are essential to the health of the subjects. Lilies in particular must have ground-cover to protect the young shoots, so, plant the more slender lilies like L. cernuum and L. concolor among heaths and dwarf rhododendrons; ~~L. tubellum is particularly suited fit for growing among gaultherias, the~~; L. tubellum and the Nomochates are especially fit for growing among gaultherias, ~~and~~ rhododendrons and allied plants in sandy peat or leafmould; L. maculatum alutaceum with its apricot-orange ~~for~~ cups would, I think, look well in front of the bronze-purple foliage of plump, little Berberis thunbergii atropurpurea nana and, as both plants are easily accommodated, do well in full sun.

~~In the~~ Orange and purple ~~or~~ ~~subjects~~ provide one of the most arresting contrasts possible and their effectiveness together can be illustrated by looking at an individual flower-head

of Aster forestii where the brilliant violet rays stand out from the orange disc so strikingly. Primula villyana, with its ~~very~~ ^{would} flowers from deep orange buds, provides a fine backdrop for the royal purple spikes of Orchis foliosa, if the latter were readily available, but one catalogue mentions Lis "Mandarin Purple" as a ~~good companion~~ ^{substitute} and these plants ~~should~~ all do well in a similar damp position. I should rather like to try the brown-orange flowers of six-inch Mimulus luteus as a ground-cover for the filigree foliage and airy, lilac sprays of Thalictrum chelidonicum but ~~I have~~ ^{it is only} growing in cool, ~~damp~~ ^{moist}, half-shade but this is only an imaginative prospect.

A group of plants "gleaming in purple and gold" like Byron's Assyrian cohorts cannot fail to catch the eye: a clump of the deep-purple shaggy heads of Chytisma scheuchzeri on their one-foot stems backed by a cascade of bright yellow Genista pilosa procumbens. Then, some yellow can be brought into a planting of purplish heaths by using shrubs like Potentilla fruticosa, Rosa spinosissima lutea and Hypericums. Species of the last like H. polyphyllum, H. coris and H. balearicum are effective putting out their golden salvers beside Erica cinerea purpurea and its like.

NB // On reading over the preceding paragraphs, I realise that I have listed quite a number of possible colour schemes using, however, only the more usual colours and, for the most part, easily grown plants. Nevertheless it is these plants which must be responsible for providing the basic colour constituents for rock-gardening planning, as the average gardener is never going to be able to provide a mass of colour with species like Boykinia jamesii or Primula sonchifolia, exquisite as their tones may be. It is to the latter group of plants that the gardener must look when it comes to providing interest and exercising horticultural skill, no less important consideration than taste and colour but ~~for~~ ^{perhaps} easier to satisfy, initially, at any rate. [PLEASE PLACE THIS PARAGRAPH AT THE END, AFTER THE TWO SUCCEEDING ONES]

Up till now I have not mentioned ~~the colour~~ magenta, as

flowers of this colour seem to occupy a special place in the gardener's mind and have a ~~or~~ rather unjust stigma attached to them. Magenta is in fact no more difficult to locate than any other shade as long as one isolates it from other colours and situates ~~it~~ it adjacent to ~~flowers of~~ white flowers or silver foliage. In such ~~such~~ circumstances the crudeness of magenta is modified and it becomes quite a telling hue. Occasionally the very harshness of the colour itself can be exploited, rather than avoided, by planting with flowers of ^{bright} purple or deep red. One such association is that of the two largest geranium species, geranium and geranium - prilostemon (syn. geranium), where the former's brilliant ~~purple~~ purple is explosive with the vivid magenta of the black-eyed gipsy from Armenia, Geranium subulata "demissimum" in violent magenta-red can be planted by ~~the~~ more daring gardeners along with deep-purple Geranium "Gurgedyke" or, as a later-flowering variety is preferable, ^{with it} "Mrs. Kolkowald"'s red-velvet wallflower, when both plants will burst into flower with a dash of Oriental cymbals.

Briefly, now, I shall attempt to illustrate the process that should be gone through in choosing a companion for a plant, using, in this instance, well-known Gentiana sino-ornata, with its sumptuous, rich blue trumpets. Culturally, the gentian must have a moist, acid soil with a fair amount of sun and its flowering period is spread over the late summer and autumn. Luckily, there are numerous fine subjects blooming at the same time ~~but~~ and the choice is really a personal one. The bright, clear gold ~~of that~~ goblets of that fine Mediterranean bulb, Stembergia lutea, are especially good and, in pink, the undulating carpets of Himalayan Polygonum vacciniiforme are excellent, although I have found that if planted too nearby the polygonum's rampant habit might swamp the gentian. The fiery red-hot pokers of little orange-coloured Triphasia galpinii are splendid companions but I feel the South African would be happier in a hotter, drier place. A background of foliage, ~~giving a little shade,~~ ^{such as} provided by Calluna vulgaris cuprea, just beginning to melt its gold into ^{the} copper and bronze of winter, leads to my final ^{selection} ~~choice~~. Ultimately then, I think that the autumn tints of ~~that~~

the ~~type~~ North Americans ^{shrubs} Vaccinium stamineum and V. caespitosum ^{as} ^{comes} along with some scattered ~~plants~~ of Cyclamen neapolitanum, with their rich-pink, reflexed flowers and ~~the~~ intricately patterned leaves, would be a good choice to give the autumnal beauty of Gentiana sino-ornata.

[INSERT PARAGRAPH OMITTED NOW]

J. Archibald.
