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Flowers can add sensational color to your garden

By ED HUTCHISON
Special to the Record-Eagle

Red, white and blue are immensely popular colors these days. If that is what you choose for your garden this year, there is no shortage of plant material.

Among popular annuals, petunias and salvia provide those colors. Impatiens and zinnias provide white and red, ageratum provides blue and white and so on. True blue is a fairly scarce color among annuals. The old standby, the marigold, will be no help.

Patriotic colors are great and as a side note, so is white used by itself. Plants that bear white flowers in profusion — notably, impatiens, petunias and wax begonias — are wonderful when used solo, en masse, because they can be seen from a distance and well into dusk.

This article is about other colors — the so-called jewel tones — the purples, vibrant pinks, deep burgundies, porcelain blues and other non-traditional colors that stand ready to be the hallmarks of your garden this year.

Note the term "hallmark." This doesn't mean use jewel-tones everywhere but in certain places in your landscape when an intense color would bring interest and visual pleasure.

These are the colors that seem to shimmer in any light; colors so intense and so deep that they never seem to fade. The blossom opens intense, lasts for several days and then falls from the plant, intense as the moment it opened. Plants that bear jewel tone blossoms are ideal for containers where they can be seen and enjoyed close up. These are not plants you want to put someplace where it takes an effort to go to them.

These are also plants that bear flowers of perhaps common colors but in a way that is striking. Of these, the peony and poppy — both perennials — come to mind.

What is unusual about the poppy flower is the translucent color of

its blossoms — chiefly, red, pink and white and the paper-like texture. These colors can be found elsewhere but add into its clarity and "finish" of the petals and the flower is, well, special.

The same can be said of the old-fashioned favorite, the peony. There is a durable perennial that if planted in a spot to its liking will easily prosper for 25 or more years without needing attention. What is striking about many of the peony varieties is the contrast color to be found in the center of the blossoms — often a golden yellow against a creamy white, crimson or red cluster of petals. The classic peony flower has many petals, perhaps 40 or more, and these contribute to a very large, very heavy blossom that, sadly, is often ruined by rain or wind in the spring. Some varieties produce flowers with eight or fewer petals and these are striking in color and contrast against the yellow centers.

Here is a quick look at a few of the annual and perennial plants widely available that bear blossoms of exquisite beauty because of clarity or intensity of color:

Peony — clear reds and whites, especially hybrids bearing single flowers with contrasting colors. Excellent for cutting.

Poppy — this perennial is easy to grow; the foliage is almost an afterthought. Blossom colors are typically rich and deep. Not a great plant for cutting.

Petunia — look to the "Wave" and similar hybrids that bloom prolifically and bear blossoms in deep pink and purple tones. Take care to feed and water carefully this class of petunias because if this routine is disrupted, flowering can be severely diminished. Best used in massed plantings or containers.

Impatiens — this very popular annual for shade and semi-shade locations probably has the greatest range of varieties producing jewel tone blossoms in pink, purple, white, orange and other colors that truly shimmer in bright and diminishing light. Best used in mass plantings.



Photo by Ed Hutchison

The "Wave" varieties of petunias and others in its class — creeping — tend to bear intense, jewel-like flowers.

Geranium — step beyond the familiar orange-red blossomed varieties to a group of hybrids that bear intense red, violet, purple, burgundy and similar hues blossoms. Best in the garden as a specimen plant.

Tuberous begonia — this is the less common begonia, the one that grows bushy and about 12 inches tall. A popular variety is called "Non Stop." The moniker refers to its prolific blooming pattern. And what colors they are — among the best are orange, white and yellow. The term "clear" takes on new meaning here. Best in the garden as a specimen plant.

Snapdragons — an old-fashioned annual that has been dramatically improved in appearance, flower color and performance. For clear colors, it is hard to beat the "Liberty" series. Look especially for Liberty's white, yellow and pink. Enjoy the blossoms in the garden and in bouquets.

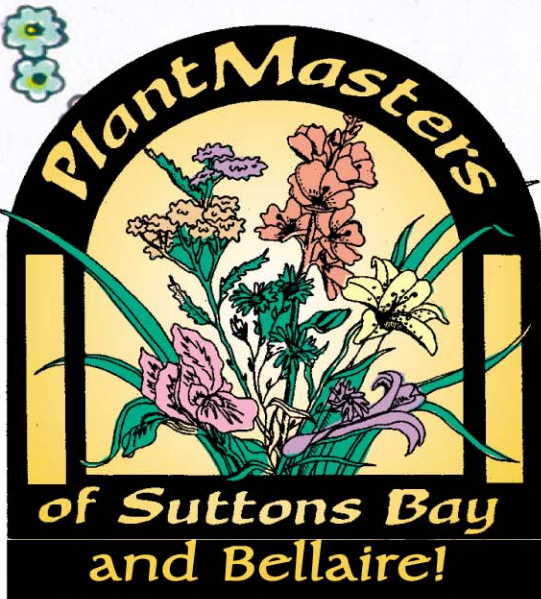


Photo by Ed Hutchison

Peony varieties offer a broad selection of colors, many of which contrast nicely with the center of the blossom.

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