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Vibrant: Above, Tiarella 'Neon Lights' bursts with contrasting colors. COURTESY OF TERRA NOVA NURSERIES



HOW TO CREATE A GLOWING GARDEN

Plants with two-tone leaves look interesting even when not in flower.

By Craig Summers Black | Contributor to The Christian Science Monitor
from the May 8, 2008 edition

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Flowers on perennial plants come and go – and usually they are gone a lot longer than they are around. But foliage ... foliage is almost forever.

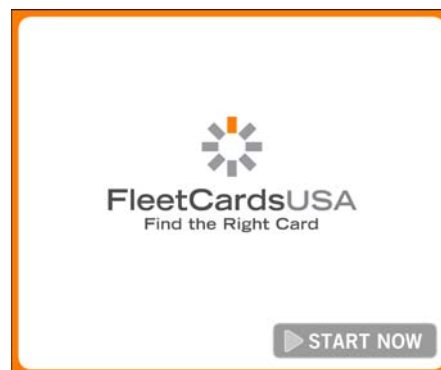
Consider: When gardeners categorize certain plants as "long-blooming" perennials, they generally mean something that has flowers all of six weeks. Well, six weeks does not a growing season make. But any self-respecting foliage plant puts on its party best for the entire growing season. For a broad band of the United States, that would be about 22 weeks of color. Six versus 22: You do the math.

Foliage plants in twin tones double the pleasure and double the fun. Yes, they're almost two plants in one. "Variegation is the spice of life," as plant breeder and collector Dan Heims of Terra Nova Nurseries in Portland, Ore., puts it.

Then again, Mr. Heims is easily America's most notorious "variegaholic." He does wax on: "I am constantly stimulated by color and texture, not flowers." And: "Variegated plants can be viewed as an organic art form when displayed as a specimen or as a light source when used en masse in a shadowy realm."

He has a point. As interesting as they are in and of themselves, variegated plants can really brighten up a shady corner. Even something as humdrum as a ring of hostas around a tree trunk grabs your attention when each leaf has a white or yellow swirl running through it. Throw in some ferns and a few other plants that love dappled shade, and you no longer have a large green Cheerio. You have a real garden.

Conventional wisdom has it that too many variegated plants are like too many noses: They're



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distracting and get in the way. I don't follow conventional wisdom. I say that too many variegated plants are like too many \$20 bills: You can't have enough.

But I do find that the garden generally needs a transition between groupings of variegated plants. In sunny beds, plants with silver or blue foliage or white-flowered plants that bloom a long time may do the trick.

In the shade, you can play with any number of foliage plants in other colors. Maybe yellow leaves, as with Hakone grass, bleeding heart, or creeping Jenny. Or purple – coral bells, snakeroot, or perennial geraniums.

One more selling point for salting the garden with variegated plants: You can cut them to bring indoors to your heart's content, and the garden will still be colorfully aglow.

TOP 10 VARIEGATED PLANTS

Flowers, shrubs, and trees with two-toned leaves are guaranteed to punch up Your landscape

Perennials for shade

• *Athyrium* 'Pewter Lace': This Japanese painted fern has silvered fronts with purplish veining, which make it a standout in lightening the shade. Like most ferns, it likes soil on the moist side. Pewter Lace tops out at 12 to 15 inches and is hardy to Zone 4.

• *Carex ciliatmarginata* 'Island Brocade': This broad-leaved sedge works equally well in the front of the border or as a ground cover. Its gold and green leaves – about 9 inches long – look like an interplay of party ribbons. Winter-hardy only to Zone 6.

• *Pulmonaria* 'Raspberry Splash': Silver speckles brighten the eight- to 10-inch leaves of this festive lungwort. Profuse pinky-purple blossoms rise above the foliage in spring. Great for lining shady paths. Hardy to Zone 4.

• *Tiarella* 'Neon Lights': This turkey-footed foamflower grows to only eight inches tall, but its spikes of tiny white starburst flowers reach almost twice that high. The centers of the leaves are a deep brown and the contrasting greens are nearly neon in spring. Sometimes there's fall rebloom. Hardy to Zone 4.

Perennials for sun

• *Eupatorium* 'Prairie Jewel': While small for a joe-pye weed (three feet high), that can be a plus – less real estate involved. Prairie Jewel has warm cream to pale-yellow variegation on its serrated, speckled leaves. Hardy to Zone 4.

• *Physostegia* 'Variegata': As the garden fades in the sweltering days of summer, the obedient plant really shines – with rosy-magenta, snapdragonlike blooms about 30 inches high, like wands over its bicolored leaves. Warning: It's a very vigorous grower. Hardy to Zone 3.

Shrubs

• *Aucuba* 'Gold Dust': The thick glossy leaves of this aucuba look almost tropical in the landscape. The bright yellow centers of the foliage light up like beacons in the shade garden. Hardy to Zone 6.

• *Forsythia* 'Kumson': As breathtaking as forsythia can be as it heralds the arrival of spring, that is how dowdy the bush appears the rest of the year – unless you plant a variegated forsythia. Kumson is arguably the best of the pack (they're all pretty wonderful), with its bright green background and silver-to-yellow veining. It grows four to six feet tall and is hardy to Zone 5.

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Trees

- *Cornus kousa* 'Wolf Eyes': This diminutive dogwood does everything right. The variegation is outstanding, as are its flowers. Fall foliage is pink to red, and berries are bright red. It's disease- and mildew-resistant, and even withstands intense summer heat. Hardy to Zone 5.
- *Fagus sylvatica* 'Tricolor': Purple, pink, raspberry, cream – this beech is loaded with eye-popping color, especially as new growth unfurls in spring. It's a spectacular specimen tree, with a height of 30 feet and a span of 20. Hardy to Zone 5.

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