

Dwarf **Evergreens** for Perennial Beauty

The ECHO Effect

A Toddler's Garden

HOW TO MOVE TREES & SHRUBS

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The blossom shapes of Rudbeckia hirta 'Indian Summer' and Erigeron echo each other, creating a pleasing scene. Photo by Donna Krischan

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DOONNA KRISCHAM



Your garden will resound with beauty when you echo the colors, textures, and forms of plants.

The Echo Effect

Story by Susan Davis Price
Photos by Krista Menzel

Plants that repeat each other's shape, texture, and color add depth and interest to the garden.

Designing gardens can be challenging, and often the results are not what we had hoped for. Instead of a unified look, we sometimes create a hodgepodge of colors and shapes. The plants may all be beautiful, but their combination does not create a satisfying picture.

One way to think about arranging harmonizing colors, textures, and forms is to think in terms of echoes. Similar to using the same plant repeatedly throughout the border, using echoes is a method to match plants by color, form, or texture. By using another plant or structure (a pot or a bench, perhaps) with similar characteristics, we enhance the plant's color, form, or texture. For example, growing pink tulips in front of old-fashioned pink bleeding heart makes each more attractive.

Or placing fuzzy lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*) near mountain bluet's (*Centaurea montana*) velvety leaves calls attention to both. This repetition helps achieve serenity, harmony, beauty, and appeal.

Color Matching

Color is the most obvious way to echo a plant, and many gardeners already unconsciously arrange plants by color. They place reds with red or pinks with pink. Being intentional about color matching will create a greater impact. For instance, several large deep red dahlias set behind a cluster of red bee balm bring interest to the small-flowered perennials. An imposing stand of Joe-Pye weed (*Eupatorium*) growing near pink turtle-

The Echo Effect

heads (*Chelone lyonii*) gives oomph to the delicate blossoms.

Matching foliage color works, too. *Heuchera* 'Purple Petticoats' placed beneath *Rosa glauca* accentuates the purplish tint found in the rose's leaves. In the same way, a plant with gray leaves, for example, Japanese painted fern (*Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum*), will bring out the gray. The red stems of each, fern and rose, will become more visible when grown together.

You can multiply the effect with several plants and clusters. For example, place *Carex elata* 'Bowles' Golden', *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldstrum', and *Ligularia* 'The Rocket' together. Here the gold foliage of the carex echoes the flowers of the other two plants, and the ligularia's spiky flowers and the slender fronds of carex add contrasting form.

Widening the types of plants used makes building color echoes even more exciting and subtle. So the bright leaves of the small shrub *Spiraea* 'Goldflame' form a glowing backdrop to the all-yellow, large-cupped daffodil 'Golden Aura'. When the bulbs fade, replace them with golden annuals. In similar fashion, a group of white tulips around the base of paper birch makes a striking combination.

Matches with structures are sometimes accidental but effective. This spring, I saw a dramatic pairing—the bare red branches of a line of dogwoods against a buff-colored, red-trimmed house. From late fall through early spring, this sight was stunning. Did the owners plan the echoes? One can only guess.

Yet more subtle is a combination in which one plant intensifies the color of another, as happens when you combine two plants with different concentrations of color. For example, the soft pink flower spikes of lambs' ears are often overlooked. But

situated beneath a clear, pink rose, such as the hardy shrub 'Morden Centennial', the blooms along the stalk jump into view.

Variation lends itself to echo. The crisp, white edging of a hosta (say 'Lakeside Dragonfly' or 'Francee') becomes more noticeable with white impatiens planted around it. The variegation itself is emphasized if that same hosta stands among a cluster of *Lamium* 'White Nancy'. The two plants contrast as well in leaf shape, size, and texture. The solid gold moneywort (*Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea') with its bright, dime-sized leaves will spark up the variegation of the charming, short molinia, (*Molinia caerulea* 'Variegata'). The colors of a delicate yellow tulip with orange stripes make a lovely focal point when placed near golden daffodils with orange centers. The same tulips would be lost in the midst of a jumble of colors.

Certain flowers, because of their wide color range, lend themselves to echoing. Lilies, tulips, daylilies, pansies, and petunias come in pinks, reds, yellows, purples, and whites, giving the gardener a choice of hues. The perennials will show their colors only a few weeks, but the annuals among them can keep up the color scheme much longer. For example, pink tulips beneath a pink, ornamental crabapple tree can be followed by pink impatiens.

Foliage plants, including shrubs and grasses, offer more variety, coming in shades of bronze, purple, and reddish leaves, in addition to green. Hostas, alone, can be golden, bluish, and striped, as well as lime green, forest green, and emerald. Because most remain the same color throughout the season, they can be matched with structures or garden ornaments for a long display.

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Below: The leaf shapes of coralbells (*Heuchera*) and cranesbills (*Geranium*) echo each other.
Below, right: White and purple irises bring different color intensities to this mixed border.



Containers are an excellent way to emphasize hues in a garden and can act as filler when garden plants are no longer in bloom. The pot itself can accentuate the shades of the plants growing within. Containers come in so many colors and finishes that it's easy to match plant and pot. For example, coleus are always striking, but coleus in bright shades of gold, orange, and bronze are even more attractive when placed in a terra cotta pot or a glazed russet one.

Shape and Form

Plant form also contributes to a garden's harmony. Garden writers and designers define form many ways. Cole Burrell, prolific author of books and articles, states in *Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Perennials* (1999) that perennials can have "these basic forms: creeping or prostrate, mounded, weeping, round, vase-shaped, oval upright, pyramidal, upright, and columnar." In an *American Gardening* article, Rand Lee sees form as four simple shapes: spikes, blobs, pools, and mists. I'd like to add cascading or weeping forms, as exemplified by old-fashioned bleeding heart. In any case, you needn't be scientific about it. All of us can look at plants and observe that they "present" as several general shapes in the garden. Putting similar shapes near each other pulls a garden together; having a chaotic array of forms can be unattractive and confusing.

Different shapes play different roles in the garden. Spikes or upright plants, such as delphiniums or alliums, draw the eye upward. They create a framework with their linear nature. Rounded plants add substance to the garden. These "blobs" come in large ('Annabelle' hydrangea, for example, or small ('Silver Mound' artemisia [*Artemisia schmidtiana*]) sizes. Placing several rounded forms, like lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*) and a soft mound of bishop's cap (*Epimedium*) or cat-mint (*Nepeta*), within sight of each other throughout the garden can tie the border together. And spiky plants, such as

bellflower, can be echoed with other upright flowers, such as foxglove or salvia. When certain signature forms repeat across the border, the numerous other shapes no longer seem haphazard.

Plants that cascade like fountains, such as daylilies, grasses (perhaps *Miscanthus* or *Hakonechloa*), old-fashioned bleeding heart, or Solomon seal (*Polygonatum*), can be paired when their cultural requirements are the same. Such shapes give a dash of drama to the border.

"Pools" are often placed on the garden's edges. These plants hug the ground and spread like a horizontal puddle. Oft used "pools" are moneywort (*Lysimachia nummularia*), the creeping thymes (*Thymus* spp.), ajugas (*Ajuga reptans*), and creeping phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*). When one creeping plant is used, it may be overlooked. But using several ensures that the plants have an impact. Mists, like meadow rue (*Thalictrum rochebrunianum*), give the garden romance but can be visually lost when used singularly.

Contrast and Matching

Contrasting as well as similarly shaped plants bring balance to any garden. All upright, erect plants would be repetitive and too stimulating; all rounded shapes would be boring. A predominance of rounded or oval shapes with some spikes for focus draws the eye through the border.

Matching leaf shapes is a fun garden exercise. Many are lancelike, such as daylilies and iris. Some, such as 'Powis Castle' artemisia (*Artemisia* 'Powis Castle'), are finely dissected. Others can be described as paddle shaped, such as those found in bergenia (*Bergenia cordifolia*) and prickly pear (*Opuntia*). One of my favorite leaf shapes is the heart, seen on numerous charming plants—violets, brunnera (*Brunnera macrophylla*), and many hostas. In examining my borders, I discovered that the leaves of lady's mantle are a larger version of the leaves of old-fashioned coralbells (*Heuchera* spp.).

Below, center: The deep pink of *Veronica spicata* echoes the 'Pink Double Delight' coneflower behind it.
Below, right: While not identical, the shape of the coleus and sweet potato vine leaves are similar.



Textural Echoes and Contrasts

While elements such as color, size, and shape rightfully come first in any garden design, the texture of leaves adds to the sensory experience. Leaves may be glossy, like European wild ginger (*Asarum europeum*) and periwinkle (*Vinca major*); matte, like evening primrose (*Oenothera*); fuzzy, like lamb's ear; or corrugated, like *Hosta sieboldiana* 'Elegans'. Of course, plants can combine two characteristics and be glossy as well as corrugated (*Hosta elata*) or matte and fuzzy. The eye quickly tires of many shiny-leaved plants together and is unable to note differences between plants. All matte makes for a boring garden. But a cluster of glossy leaves in the midst of many matte ones adds a bright, cheerful note to the beds. Several felted foliage plants between glossy ones makes for interesting viewing. You can play with these textures to make your garden more inviting.

Design Strategy

Does it all seem too much to consider? Then break the design into smaller components. Work with one border or one edge of a border. Work with one element—try threading one color through the bed or parading one shape around the border. When purchasing plants, line them up at the garden center to test their "rightness" with each other.

And lastly, remember that every garden is a work in progress. Plants can be moved; they can be given away. New plants can be obtained from friends or the nursery. Nature itself will change our gardens from year to year. Some plants will succumb to disease or the weather. Half the fun of gardening is trying something new each season. **19**

St. Paul gardener Susan Davis Price is a regular contributor to Northern Gardener.

Form (spikes and mounds) and color (yellows, pinks, and deep green) are repeated to give this bed a harmonious feel.

