Taste and Colour in the Rock Garden

Many gardens 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 planting 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. Natural underplanting of shrubs and combinations of plants, such as carpeters over bulbs and shade plants, can often be exploited, for instance the blue of muscari piercing a pink mat of flatshapulata "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 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 not for years be a source of disappointment and annoyance, especially if the plants are difficult to grow or move.

An unexpected colourless discord of tones is usually struck by two plants of a similar hue flowering in close proximity at the same time. An excellent, albeit extremely regrettable, example was a slide, shown at a recent meeting, of a remarkably well-grown specimen of *Douglasia vitifolia* along side *Mahonia aquifolium*, whose clear pale yellow sunshine had made the madder yellow of the former look quite mustardy when.

In the same way two blues flower together, the purple in the darker one is always accentuated. All this does not mean to say that a planned association of shades will not invariably be a success on the contrary. Many well thought out contrasts have been absolutely misfired, and been failure of the flowering season to overtake failure. But there are a few fairly reliable criteria when it comes to placing, which may help in the displaying a plant or preferably group of plants well. In the following paragraphs the examples given and the
Blue and pink is usually a fairly reliable association, particularly if the blue is a pale one. The agave showery of Amphilodes cappadoica, with the soft rose of Sarcopetalum and the primulas are delicately lovely in light, cool shade and again Chionodoxa lucillae in soft blue is delightful among the feet of canine and steam-headed Tulipa Kaufmanniana. "The First." The complementary colours of blue and yellow are for 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 Eleutheria 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 attempt at satisfying both cultural and aesthetic requirements at once: the forsythia, not a fastidious plant, gives a little shade to both the other subjects while all three flower at the same time. An easy and pleasant harmony of blue and yellow for those rock gardeners, who are not too fussy or exact, can be obtained by having the two Californian sun-loving annuals, Euphorbus nana and Echium Echinothrix, California, together near each other. The blue and white of the little Euphorbus with the pale gold of the poppy could not be bettered. Similarly equally good and less obtuse couple of Californians are Baby blue Eyes, Nemophila mucronata, and Cream Cups, Lithospermum Californicus.

Bright reds are not common among alpines and are also rather difficult to place. Whereas blue and yellow, the two complementary colour, associate well, the complement of red is green. Consequently reds frequently show up best against a dark emerald background. So plants with dark 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 like the same conditions. Bright blue sometimes go well with red and I recall having of the two Delphiniums delphiniums, fluttering gentian-blue D. tetonense and scarlet D. rubicula, associating

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well together. Reginald Farrer mentioned a fine natural combination in "The English Rock Garden" on similar lines: & electric blue Ajuga reptans (syn. A. reptans) covering the ground between the sealing-wax red Turk's caps of Tulipa hortorum, both being backed and shaded by dark, little Linum montana. But if a companion cannot be found for a bright red or any other dangling bloom one can do no better than use a dark or silver leaved shrub as a background.

The use of silver leaves or white flowers is always effective and is excellent for tempering garish colours. Bright yellow species are present a good appearance when piled their sparkling golds through a quilt of Alteranara dioica under gay a 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 Sambucus can be modified by planting with Polemonium saxatile citrinum (not the same) or even Biscuit-ridge A. J. "Budleighville" in a sunny, sunny place. A. J. Johnson, who always had a fine eye for colour, recommended placing the variegated scarlet of tall Tulipa chalcedonica against the cool slate green and white of Senecio montanus.

The last combination gives rise to the fact that many associations of plants are not only of give pleasure to the outlook 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. cammianum and L. canadense among heaths and dwarf rhododendrons; T. tuberum is particularly suited for growing among gaultherias, etc.; T. tuberum and the Nomochales are especially fit for growing among gaultherias and rhododendrons and allied plants in sandy peat or leaf mould; A. maculatum alatum with its apricot-orange cups would, I think, look well in front; the bronze-purple foliage of Plumbago, little Buddleia thunbergii atropurpurea nano, and, as both plants are easily accommodated, do well in full sun.

How the bright and purple-flowered plants provide one of the most arresting contrasts possible and their effectiveness together can be illustrated by looking at an individual flower head
of Vater forcasti where the brilliant violet rays stand out from the
orange disc so strikingly. *Simula bulleyana*, with its rich glows
from deep orange until it provides a fine backdrop for the royal purple
spikes of *Concolor forssii*, if the latter were readily available, but one
catalogue mentions this "Mandarin Purple" as a good companion and
these plants would all do well in a similar damp position
I should rather like to try the brown-orange flowers of six-inch
*Simula brunetti* as a ground-cover for the filigree foliage and airy,
blooming sprays of *Chrysanthemum chabodanii* but I know this is only a
growing in cool, damp, half-shade but this is only an imaginative
prospect.

A group of plants "glimmering in purple and gold" like Hytor's
Assyrian cohorts cannot fail to catch the eye: a clump of the deep-
purple shaggy heads of *Chrysanthemum schweizeri* on their one-foot stems
backed by a cascade of bright yellow *Genista pilosa* pseudanana. Then,
some yellow can be brought into a planting of buffish heaths by
using shrubs like *Potentilla fruticosa*, *Rosa spinosissima* lutescens
and *Hypericum*. Species of the last like *H. polyphyllum*, *H. corni* and
*H. calycinum* are effective putting out their golden salves besides
*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-gardens. Planning as
the average gardener is never going to be able to provide a mass of
colour with species like *Koehnia jamessii* or *Sedum sonchifolium*
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 excising horticultural skill, no less important consideration
than taste and colour but 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

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Flowers of this colour seem to occupy a special place in the gardener's mind and have a 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 adjacent to white flowers or silver foliage. In such circumstances the crudeness of magenta is modified and it becomes quite a telling note. Occasionally the very harshness of the colour itself can be exploited, rather than avoided, by planting with flowers of purple or deep red. One such association is that of the two deep geranium species, S. peltatum and S. × sanguineum, where the former's brilliant purple is explored with the vivid magenta of the black-eyed susan from America, Chrysanthemum × grandiflora, in violent magenta-red can be planted by more daring gardeners along with deep-purple Aconitum 'Bisquick' or, in a later flowering variety in preference.

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-nemorosa, 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 that and the choice is really a personal one. The bright clear gold of some yellowish or of that fine Mediterranean bulbo, Sternbergia littoralis, are especially good and, in pink, the undulating carpets of Heuchera

Polygonum sacchariflorum are excellent, although I have found that if planted too near the Polygonum's rampant habit might swamp the gentian. The fiery red-not flowers of little orange-red Syringa fauriei or splendid companions but I feel the South African would be happier in a hotter, drier place. A background of foliage, giving a little shade, too such as provided by Calluna vulgaris cuprea, just beginning to melt its golden, coppery and orange of winter, leads to my final choice. Ultimately then, I think that the autumn tints of Heuchera