

# A HOME & GARDEN

# Guide



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# Harmony, clashes and fashion

By Arthur O. Tucker  
Delaware State News

In most gardening classes, they inevitably teach students to plant in bunches of threes or fives and never place orange-reds next to blue-reds. That works nicely in theory but hasn't always panned out in my garden.

I planted three "Heritage" river birches in a nice clump. They grew well for a few years, and then one mysteriously fell over halfway up the trunk, as if it were made of rubber. Now I have a bunch of two.

I have found catalogs to be somewhat less than frank in their descriptions of color, and often I have ended up with clashes of red. Now, in my older age, I say it was planned, and "Isn't it interesting?" It is always a topic of conversation and causes visitors to either question their assumptions or my sanity.

I remember attending a class on perennials in which one of the speakers was Frederick McGourty, then editor of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden series, owner of his own nursery, and author of a book on perennials with Pamela Harper. He said to treat perennial borders as living flower arrangements. The school of American flower arrangement teaches three classes of flowers: globular (e.g., daisies), line (e.g., delphiniums) and filler (e.g., baby's breath).

The American style usually includes a focal point, often an accessory in addition to the vase. In terms of color, the primaries (red, blue, yellow) are the easiest to use, often in pastels, with white to break up any clashes.

I saw McGourty's style carried over in a catalog cover that included globe thistle (blue globular), double heliopsis (yellow globular), black cohosh (white line), and phlox (pink, filler) with a small statue as a focal point. Very effective!

Later, I attended a lecture on gardening by Lauren Springer (now Ogden). Lauren flashed up pictures from Vogue and other fashion magazines, showing use of color, texture and form and then showed the same principles carried over to a perennial bor-



Submitted photo  
Three dresses created by Melissa Klinker are inspired by the bat flower.

## Garden Tales

der. In the border, following this theme, broad, flat surfaces (e.g., hosta) are complemented by cut surfaces (e.g., ferns), especially if there is also a complement of color, as, for example, large yellow daylilies planted with the purple spikes of lavender.

I remembered these interactions of fashion and the garden when my daughter was attending fashion school (IADT) in Chicago. The assignment was to create dresses inspired by plants.

A number of students had chosen orchids, but I immediately suggested the bat flower (*Tacca chantrieri*) with its folds and tendrils of black-purple. Melissa created three dresses inspired by the bat flower that were in shades of purple rather than black, which might have come off as too goth.

For my classes at DSU and Master Gardeners, I have combed through books and photographs to create a handout called "Herbaceous Harmonies."

If you would like a copy, e-mail a request to atucker@desu.edu with the by-line "Herbaceous Harmonies," and I will send you a Word file. If you prefer to write instead, my address is c/o Claude E. Phillips Herbarium, Dept. of Agriculture & Natural Resources, Delaware State University, Dover,



Wikipedia.com photo  
The bat flower (*Tacca chantrieri*) is a tropical houseplant from Southeast Asia. White-flowered species are also known to exist.

DE 19901-2277 (sorry, I cannot answer requests for this handout by telephone).

*Editor's note: On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call (302) 857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call (302) 857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.*