

Lessons from Monet's Garden (Part I)

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Impressionist painter Claude Monet spent decades building his garden in Giverny, France where he lived for over forty years. Although many of his famous works were painted there, he said that his most beautiful masterpiece was his garden. Troubled by industrialization and progress of the time, Monet developed a deep appreciation for nature. His garden became a retreat where he allowed his imagination to take control. It is from a man whose entire world and personal philosophies became entwined with flowers that we can be taught. Lessons learned from Monet's garden are:

- Monochromatic plantings create interest by using various textures and hues through a wide range of flowers, bulbs and annuals. For instance his pink plantings include Peonies, Roses and Hollyhocks.
- Polychromatic plantings using primary colors provide high contrast beds and include: Hydrangeas, Tulips, Dahlias, Poppies, Iris and Hibiscus.
- The straight edges of his garden beds and gravel garden paths (to make use of the light and plant partnerships) were softened by the informal, but overflowing plantings.
- Flowers were planted alongside vegetables and mingled among the fruit trees as well.
- No pruning into unnatural shapes such as cones or boxes allowed.
- Wild flowers were considered the "soul of the garden" and they were mixed in the beds with hybrid plants to soften the "unnatural" look of the hybrid plants.
- Monet demanded daily deadheading, although tedious, it allows the plant's energy to focus on producing new flowers.
- Each plant earned a space in the garden for a specific reason (color, intensity, shimmer, suggested movement or translucence). An unfamiliar plant was experimented with in the nursery first.
- Monet felt that examples of good companion plants were red and pink, but improved with the addition of silver, gray or silvery blue foliage.

The lessons that can be taken from Monet's passionate bond with plants are nearly limitless. His color harmonies and plant companions are inspirational and will be addressed in a future column. Imagine though, Monet's fortune in possessing the ability (and intently enjoying the journey) in creating two masterpieces, one from nature and another on canvas.