



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

Blooming Privacy

Color, color and color – many homeowners want plants with lots of flower color throughout the year.

Too often an opportunity is missed when the ubiquitous hedge contains only one type of plant – and invariably it is green in winter, spring, summer and autumn. What's a color lover to do? We suggest a design that includes a flowering shrub border! There are a plethora of attractive shrubs that bloom and reach a height to screen a fence, wall or the neighbors.

Combining a variety of plants with different forms, leaf textures and bloom times is not a new concept. Flowering plant borders of herbaceous (non-woody stems) perennial plants were de rigueur in Victorian gardens of the late 1800s and continue today. Supersize the plants and create a colorful textural screen.

When selecting the shrubs consider the ultimate potential sizes, leaf texture, foliage color, blossom color and season of bloom. Other factors include cold hardiness, whether the plants keep their leaves during the cooler months (critical for year around privacy) and their light level, soil and moisture requirements.

Space most of these shrubs four to six feet apart. Resist the temptation to individually alternate each shrub. Instead, plant two or three of the same shrub in a row and then switch to one, two or three of another type of shrub and repeat. The few loners worked into the border will act as focal points. If there is enough depth to stagger them, place the ones with a coarser leaf texture at the rear and more diminutive shrubs or ornamental grasses in the front.

The design steps:

- Select shrubs based on similar growing needs, form, leaf texture, bloom color and season of bloom.
- Determine the planted spacing for each type of plant. Space each of them accordingly so they can blend together without being cramped.
- Calculate the length of the border, sketch out a plan placing them in groupings and occasionally use one as an accent.

- Determine how many plants are needed.

Once your border is in place it's time to lightly trim it to promote fullness. As it fills in, make sure it isn't sheared. The shrubs must be allowed to develop flower buds that stay in place until they bloom. The sweet viburnum found in most gardens can develop white fragrant blooms if they aren't sheared away, but sadly that is usually the case. Let the shrubs mature in a pyramidal shape (wider at the base than the top) to the height desired. Use moderate hand pruning scheduled well before each plant's bloom time and follow up with regular light pruning. You'll have a flowering privacy hedge with pizzazz throughout the year – with color from the ground to eye level.



Above, *Rondeletia leucophylla* - Panama rose. Bottom, A maturing flowering shrub border at an eight-foot wall.



Top, *Cestrum aurantiacum* - golden jasmine. Middle, *Justicia spicigera* - orange plume. Bottom, *Myrcianthes fragrans* - Simpson's stopper.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas, Hortus, Oasis.