



in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

Faithful Foliage

Stephen & Kristin Pategas

Colorful blossoms certainly make an attractive garden, but blossoms on many plants are fair-weather friends. They arrive and depart based on the seasons, their bloom period, a heavy rain, or a strong wind. Some flowering sessions may last less than a week. While that may be more than long enough to have visitors bunking at your home, it is a short visit for flower color in a garden. To add year 'round punch to the garden think of the foliage as the friends that stick around, while the flowers are the acquaintances that come and go - seemingly on a whim.

Foliage is the backbone of the plants' contribution to the design of the garden. Blossoms rarely cover a plant thus hiding the foliage; the leaves are always there, visible as a backdrop to the seasonal glory of the bloom. So, focus on the foliage and when selecting plants, think of the leaves first. What color, size, and texture are they? Within a garden setting, the larger leaves provide the coarse texture and the smaller ones are the fine texture and voila - contrast is created.

Of course size is relative, so look for plants with leaves that have dramatically different sizes from each other. When viewed up close (from the walkway instead of the street), a small leaf could be coarse compared to neighboring teeny leaved plants.

Here in Central Florida we have mostly ever-green plants with leaves that stick around throughout the year. Whether it is hot and humid or cold and windy, they hang in there. Here are successful foliage pairings with coarse and fine textures - remember that leaf shapes and colors also contribute to the visual contrast. These companions will grow together in the same soil and light conditions and are best buddies in a garden. Nurture long lasting relationships and select plant friends first by their foliage, that's what stays true day in and day out.

Shade (coarse/fine)

- cast iron plant and autumn fern
- holly fern and mondo grass
- Japanese fatsia and/or lady palm and/or autumn fern
- oakleaf hydrangea and camellia

Part sun (coarse/fine)

- Xanadu philodendron and lily of the Nile
- yellow anise and dwarf Walter's viburnum
- saw palmetto and coontie
- Beautyberry and yaupon holly

Sun (coarse/fine)

- dwarf burford holly and dwarf nandina
- cow's tongue/paddle plant and Mexican feather grass
- cardboard plant and dwarf Asian jasmine
- basil and thyme
- century plant and bulbine
- African iris and muhly grass
- orange bird of paradise and liriop



Top left: A garden of textures (design by Hortus Oasis). Top right: The succulent cow's tongue/*Kalanchoe thyrsiflora* 'Fantastic' and Mexican feather grass. Bottom left: Sculptural cardboard plant with dwarf Asian jasmine. Bottom right: Fatsia and autumn fern soften a fence.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis.