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in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*

Garden Trends In Color



Persian shield in a doorway garden.

Search the web for color trends and you find names that resemble foolish fruits - quixotic plum; a heavy metal band - ultra violet; or the latest sensual fragrance for wine lovers - grapemist. But the trend is clear; color in the garden is rampant and monochromatic color schemes are hot. After all, with flower and foliage color as our palette we are painting a picture in the garden.

For your next selection of colors from the palette, consider violet and its various shades of lavender, fuchsia and magenta. Colorful foliage ensures year 'round color and *Strobilanthes dyeranus*, or Persian shield, is a perfect start for your indigo mood. This soft-stemmed evergreen perennial produces six inch long elliptic, toothed leaves in unequal pairs that are dark green with a flush of deep purple and silvery overlay. The leaf undersides are dark purple, adding to the color interest. In the autumn look for short spikes of funnel-shaped pale blue flowers up to one and one quarter inch long.

Persian shield prefers shade to filtered light. Full sun dulls the foliage color. Plant this native to Myanmar (formerly Burma), in a humus-rich soil that is well-draining. Keep it evenly moist and consider planting it in containers, paired with black-leaf plants such as *Ipomoea* 'Black Heart' or *Colocasia* 'Black Beauty'. *S. dyeranus* thrives in Zones 9 - 11, but can be planted as an annual elsewhere and brought indoors in the winter as a houseplant. Only deer and rabbits will shun the Persian shield.

Another fashionable flower is found on the stylish purple fire spike

(*Odontonema callistachyum*) which is a must for your violet garden. Purple fire spike is an evergreen shrub that grows in Zones 8 - 10 and is root-hardy to 20 degrees with fall mulching. It grows in full sun to part shade and prefers well-drained soil and regular water. With a mature height of 4 to 8 feet and 4 to 6 feet width, consider purple fire spike for a flowering shrub border. The lush dark green elliptic to oblong foliage is 6 to 12 inches long with wavy margins. From summer to winter terminal spikes of lavender to purple/fuchsia tubular flowers provide nectar and great color.

You may be familiar with the red fire spike (*O. strictum*) which is a long-time staple for butterfly and hummingbird gardens. Many gardeners have observed that the bloom time of the purple fire spike neatly offsets when the red fire spike flowers. Grow both to provide near year 'round food for flower nectar feeders. ■



The fantastic foliage of Strobilanthes dyeranus.



Odontonema callistachyum in full bloom.



Purple firespike blooms attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

All photography by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis

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