

An Impressionist Masterpiece

Intriguing Flora for your Garden Composition

By Dave Dunn and Rob Caron
Rideau Woodland Ramble

When you think about your favorite painting what is it about the image that you like? What makes it memorable, different? You can ask these same questions about your garden. You can think of your garden as a painting, and create that image with the same tools and strategies that any artist would when tackling a clean canvas.

This is the story of using colour, form, contrast, light and texture to generate your overall garden composition. These tools can be used in the design of your garden; in just the same way a painter used a brush to bring an image to life. In this case, instead of watercolors, oils and acrylics, we are going to use intriguing and unusual conifers and shrubs



Image1- Rideau Woodland Ramble

Dave Dunn

Composition

The overall composition of your masterpiece relies on some key elements to frame the picture, create a foreground, middle and background, and feature some great bones, or

structure. The key structural elements in the garden are those things that provide context and interest in all four seasons. Interesting conifers or shrubs can become the focal points in the garden, and help weave the overall composition together. Great paintings can have strong themes and the same is true of your garden. You can decide to focus on all one colour, or all dwarf material, or intriguing shapes, or a combination of all of these. At **Rideau Woodland Ramble**, you can see a conifer garden that weaves dwarf conifers together with Hostas and Hydrangea in order to celebrate the different texture(image 1), and you can see a larger conifer garden aimed at comparing the colours and needle types of the different selections (image 2).



Image 2-Rideau Woodland Ramble

Dave Dunn

Colour

Colour is an important tool on your palette. It's sometimes a surprise though to see where you can get that colour. **Taylor's Sunburst Lodge Pole Pine** provides a stroke of gold in the early season and the **Red Tipped Norway Spruce** (Image 3) provides a shock of red.... two conifers that one may have thought of as green, and both provide a way to add that surprising dab of colour! It doesn't end there; **Japanese Maples** provide a range of colour, as do **golden, or white tipped cedars**. Spring colour can be provided by **forsythia, azalea, rhododendrons, magnolias** and more....all with selections available

and hardy to our tough gardening climate. Fall colour is also a planning element in the composition. Whether by using leaf colour or fruit or flower, keep in mind the evolving look of your garden by adding things such as **Viburnum**, and **Euonymus** to keep the image alive.



Image 3-Red-Tipped Norway Spruce
Courtesy Iseli Nursery

Contrast

Light and contrast is a tool the artist uses to shape the image and give it power and strength. You can do the same in the garden. Create a backdrop with the **Purple leafed Ninebark - Diablo**, and put a **Yellow Ribbon Cedar** in front. Punch up a shady or dark zone in the garden with a variegated **Pagoda Dogwood -Argentea**. Pop a gleaming red **Japanese Maple** into a generally green sector of the garden (image 4) All of these are examples where the strength of the contrast or the light effect creates memorable vignettes, and provides structure for the composition.



Image 4-Rideau Woodland Ramble

Dave Dunn

Form

There are so many forms to choose from with both conifers and shrubs. You can use broadly upright, extremely conical, globose or round, weeping, or ground cover. These growth habits are the equivalent of the kinds of brush stroke you use in the composition. You can contrast shapes, the same way you can contrast colours. (Image 5)(Image 6) These different selections of plant shape and growth habit will allow you to build up the layers of the painting, and reinforce the impression you are trying to create. These selections also help create the “bones” structure that will be evident in all four seasons.



Image 5 –Weeping Blue Spruce
Courtesy Iseli Nursery



Image 6-Rideau Woodland Ramble Conifer Combo Dave Dunn

Texture

The range of conifers and shrubs you can select from also allows you to consider the texture of the materials you use. Contrast textures the same way you contrast color and form. Textures are different between leaf types, needle type, and bark and so on. (Image 7/8). The shiny needle of the **Japanese Umbrella Pine** provides a very different effect to that of **the weeping cedar, weeping hemlock, or the range of Firs**. Use this contrast of textures to your advantage in the garden.



Image 7- Horstmann's Silberlocke Koreana Fir

Courtesy Iseli Nursery



Image 8-Weeping Coles Prostrate Hemlock

Courtesy Iseli Nursery

The Big Picture

As you can see all of the devices used by the painter are at your disposal in the garden. You can visualize a composition; fill it out with different forms, colour and texture of a whole range of conifers and shrubs. You can sharpen the image by how you contrast those elements, and you can give it multi season life by considering the seasonal impacts of foliage colour, flowers, fruit and bark. Frame your composition with careful edges, green lawns, forest backdrops, or built elements you create yourself.

Your garden can become a gallery of impressionist masterpieces and a constant source of inspiration for you and all those who get a chance to glimpse the paintings you create!



Image 9-Rideau Woodland Ramble

Dave Dunn

www.rideauwoodlandramble.com

613-258-3797

210 Burritts Rapids Rd

Merrickville Ontario