Color Theory for Landscape Design

Gail Hansen, PhD. University of Florida, Environmental Horticulture Department
Color Theory for Landscape Design
The Power of Color

- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Emotions

“Black-hearted”

“Tickled Pink”

“Seeing Red”

“Green with envy”

“Feeling Blue”

“True Blue”
Color Psychology

Color influences how we act and feel, depends on:

- Culture
- History
- Experience

Worldwide meaning:
- Red - represents life
- White - symbol of truce
- Green - safety
Behavior
Ready for a swim?
What is Color?

noun 1. the quality of an object or substance with respect to light reflected by the object, usually determined visually by measurement of hue, saturation, and brightness of the reflected light (light waves)

- Light source-object – viewer
- Human eye and brain together translate color
- Color exists only in the mind of the viewer

Surface of apple reflects red wavelengths absorbs all others
How Many Colors?

- Human eye sees 1 to 7 million
- Tetrachromacy-100 million
**Aristotle (340 B.C.)**
attempted to formalize color relationships

**Leonardo da Vinci (1480)**
developed color systems

**Isaac Newton (1666)**
refracted light through a prism-
created circular chart with 7 colors-
still used today

**Johann Goethe (1810)**
disagreed with Newton- took a more psychological approach

**Albert Einstein (1920)**
suggested that light/color consists of particles- physicists have yet to prove
Why use color theory?

To create color harmony—something that is pleasing to the eye—creates a sense of order and balance in the visual experience.

15 stage color wheel based on color cards of the British Royal Horticultural Society.
Color Schemes

12 stage color wheel

**Analogous** - three hues next to each other on the color wheel

**Monochromatic** - one hue with variations in lightness, darkness

**Complementary** - two hues opposite each other on the color wheel

**Triadic** - three hues equally spaced around the color wheel
Analogous Color Family

Red to Yellow
Red

- Emotionally intense - effects metabolism and blood pressure
- Aggressive, demands attention
- First color infants see
- From tiny cochineal beetles - 70,000 = 1 lb. dye
Design Notes:

- Plants to the foreground
- Highlight important elements
- Use in entertainment areas - excitement
Pink

- Romantic, affectionate
- Inspires action and confidence
- Calming, reduces aggression (pink locker rooms and prisons)
- Why are pastries in pink boxes?
Design Notes:

- Brings plants forward
- Harmony with blue and purple
- Lighten up shady areas
- Best not to pair with red
Orange

- Energy, happy, fun-loving
- Fruit and good health
- Stimulates appetite, activity
- Adults love or hate it
- Favorite of children
Design Notes

- Holds in bright light
- Harmony with blue and purple
- Tropical version of red
- Warms up a shady area
- Party space
Yellow

- Warmth, cheerfulness
- Stimulates nervous system, activates memory
- Human eye notices yellow first
- Most luminous color
- Fatiguing to the eye
Design Notes:

- Harmony with blue and purple
- Use for focal points
- Brighten shady areas
- Favorite of children
Analogous Color Family
Yellow to Blue
Green

- Nature, growth and fertility
- Relaxes muscles, improves creativity
- More shades of green than any other color
Design Notes:

- Most restful color for the human eye
- Warm or cool color
- Blends with all colors - harmony
- Highlights light colors
Blue

- Tranquility and calmness
- Slows metabolism
- #1 preferred color
- More productive in blue rooms
**Design Notes:**

- Blues look more violet in shade
- Bright blues high contrast with greens in shade
- Good for a contemplative area
Analogous Color Family
Blue to Red
Violet (Purple)

- Encourages creativity
- Symbolizes power, royalty, knowledge
- 20,000 Purpura snails = 1 oz. Tyrian purple dye
Design Notes:

- Can be a warm or cool color
- Adds depth to a bed
- Dark purple disappears in shade
- Harmony with Yellow and Orange
Mono-Chromatic Color Scheme

White garden

Green garden
White

- Light, goodness, purity
- White flowers have stronger scent
- Considered a summer color
- Goes with all colors
Design Notes:

- Brighten a shady spot
- Highlight a focal point
- Brings out true hues of colors
Concept #1

- Warm colors appear closer and make a space feel smaller
- Cool colors appear distant and make a space feel larger
Concept #2

- Balance between pairs of colors
- Use a smaller amount of the brightest color

Yellow Violet
Choosing a Color Scheme

- Building or hardscape colors - blend or contrast
- Type of use in space - entertaining - warm reds, yellows
- Rest - cool blues
Choosing a Color Scheme

- Light conditions - light colors for shade
- Garden type or theme - tropical, cottage, contemporary
- Time of day space is used
Thank you!
White and Black—It Depends

- Artist- pigments
- White- Yes, can’t mix colors- but use white pigment
- Black- Yes, is blending all colors (pigments)

- Scientist- light
- White- an object that reflects back all rays of light
- Black- an object that absorbs all rays of light