

Little at Large

WHEN talking about design, people's minds soon go to the hugely expensive show gardens displayed at Chelsea. In these cases the hard landscaping plays a vital role, increasing the price tremendously.

Designing though is more than just hard materials and you can achieve a lot in your garden by following a careful planting plan.

Although it is the first thing people notice, flowers have much more to offer than a simple splash of colour.

Learn to consider shapes and texture which, combined with colour, will give you outstanding border effects.

Ball-shaped flowers are very distinct among a massed planting and the larger the lollipop heads the more impressive the effect. Good examples are *Allium cristophii*, bearing flowerheads up to 20cm across, and the large-headed *Agapanthus 'Bressingham Blue'*.

A mass of tiny button shapes is also eye-catching. The pink-red mounds of *Knautia macedonica* or the pincushions of *Astrantia* will look good next to less distinct flower shapes like the loose plumes of ornamental grasses. Flowers



Garden talk by
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that form plumes and clouds are much less defined than the lollipop forms and because they lack that rigid uniformity, they make good softeners and fillers among the more well defined balls and spires.

Specimens like *Crambe cordifolia* and *Alchemilla mollis* will explode into a mass of tiny individual flowers adding drama to any border.

Strong vertical shapes of spires like *Sisyrinchium*, *Liriope* and *Liatris* will bring any border to life. For a shorter display choose specimens like *Salvia nemerosa*, *Physostegia* or *Persicaria*.

Daisies are the most recognisable of flower shapes and because of their flat heads contrast well with vertical forms. Distinct daisy forms include *Echinacea purpurea*, *Helenium* and *Rudbeckia*. Plants like *Sedums* and *Achillea* have a stronger horizontal form than daisies and will look even more dramatic combined with spires and balls.

So take your eye away from colours and experiment with shapes for stunning effects.

Martin Little