

Border Patrol

Beautiful borders give great and lasting first impressions

Story by Chris Olsen

Create the "WOW" factor with vibrant perennials. Planted as a border, a mixture of different textures and colors in front of an evergreen hedge will definitely capture attention.

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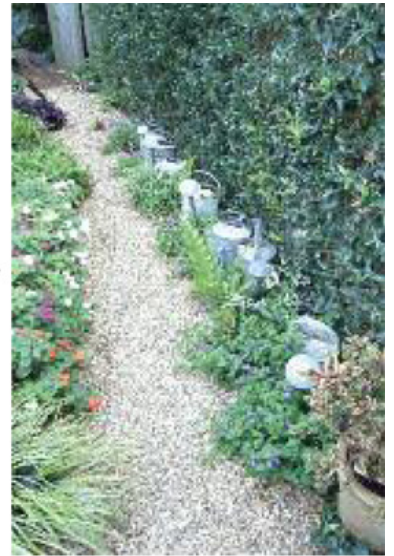
If you are like me, you are addicted to plants.

Plants are my life! It's not just my career, but it is also my hobby. When I am tired of the world after a stressful day, I just want to get out in the yard and check on how much my landscape grew overnight. To watch something grow and burst full of color is simply pleasurable. That simplicity is what I search for, because we, as humans, are the ones who make life so hard at times. Plants just remind me of how life can be easier and more enjoyable. After a stroll in my yard, I go inside as a new and energized person, who is now ready for tomorrow's challenges (usually).

To a person with a plant addiction, open space in the garden is wasted space. Exposed open areas of mulch are ideal areas for additional plants. Even if your garden is void of open areas you can create some. I have been known to even remove flagstones from patios therefore providing new ground. It looks great when within a patio you have landscaped areas. This is ideal for herbs and ground covers. I have found, believe it or not, that herbs grow better in such confined areas. Why? Herbs like to grow over a hard surface such as in the middle of a patio or along a walkway. When it rains, water no longer splashes dirt underneath their foliage (which they hate), and the plants stay warm at night from the radiating surface heat. This is why herbs, among other border plants, grow better along walkways.

There are so many reasons to grow border plants besides just herbs. When landscaping, I plant the big guys in the back of the garden and then layer down to my border plantings. These border plants usually are the most interesting, and therefore demand up front attention. They are better viewed up close and personal. Border plants can be perennial or seasonal. The combination of the two gives impact, creates interest and adds variety.

A border of antique watering cans purchased from local garage sales takes center stage. By planting ground covers around each can, you are able to soften their look and add more interest. Be "Green" and reuse the rainwater that the cans capture. ▶



Never be shy!!!!!! Plant elephant ears along with seasonal color to create that perfect border. Also plant regular mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*) which is one of the toughest and easiest border plants to grow. Evergreen and very low maintenance makes this plant one of my favorite ground covers. ▼



A raised planter is ideal for a border. Upfront and personal, you can't overlook this garden. Assorted bananas and cannas add height and rich burgundy hues.



◀ **If you are tired of your border plants drooping and hanging over your walk-ways, then plant a low edge of wintergreen boxwoods (*Buxus 'Wintergreen'*). Don't be cheap and space them too far apart. I plant 1 gallon plants close together (I mean touching each other) for an immediate hedge. I like to keep mine about 18 inches tall. It only takes three trimmings per year.**

Border plants play an important role visually and functionally. Whether along walkways or along a flower bed edge, they not only look lush and full but help keep the other plants in bounds. My perennial garden is surrounded by an 18-inch hedge of wintergreen boxwoods (*Buxus microphylla koreana*). I love this plant!!! I think boxwoods will outlast the cockroach in the future. They are durable, easy and virtually disease free. You can't ask for anything better than that. Yes...most are green but there is a variegated variety available. The variegated boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens 'Variegata'*) is just as tough as its green cousins. Hedged boxwoods help create a visual clean line and, believe it or not, they keep my perennials off my pea gravel pathway. No longer do I have to worry about leggy plants falling across the pathway. My boxwoods are like a living wall. All other plants now stay in bounds.

I also plant bright and colorful foliage plants such as golden sweet flag (*Acorus gramineus 'Ogon'*) along stepping stones. Not only will you enjoy this wonderful plant during the day, but at night too. Forget about nightscaping with a million path lights. Golden sweet flag grass glows in the dark. No kidding! Better yet, if you have a wet area, this wonderful ornamental grass tolerates wet feet as well. As a matter of fact this plant can be used as a water plant. Need I say more?!

Case in point, the other night, I was driving down a country road and thought I saw, what I believed, was the airport – no joke! But it was a farm house! By substituting half the lights with light reflecting foliage plants, this house would have looked more like a home and not a commercial dwelling. Plus...just think how much money they would save on their electric bill. More money means more plants you can buy and every little bit helps!

When I design a landscape, I always try to use different and unique border plants that stand alone on their own. For a sunny location, I suggest you try growing my favorites, such as *Coreopsis 'Nana'*, *Festuca 'Select'*, *Helianthemum 'Wisley Primrose'*, *Stachys byzantina* (lamb's ears), *Sedum 'Tricolor'*, *Thymus serpyllum 'Minimus'* (creeping thyme) and the ground cover rose *Rosa hybrida 'Red Meidiland'*. A combo of all will give you a colorful, flowering fiesta!



◀ **What was otherwise a plain deck is now swallowed whole with a lush border of sweet flag grass (*Acorus gramineus 'Ogon'*) and assorted lantanas just vibrant with orange and red flowers.**

For those of you who have a lot of shade, fear not, I have a list of great plants for a shady oasis. May I suggest you try the following: *Heuchera* 'Palace Purple', *Geranium sang.* var. 'Striatum', hosta 'Golden Tiara' (my favorite....oh so easy to grow!!!!!!), Hosta 'Patriot' (what a show stopper), *Ajuga* 'Catlin's Giant' and *Platycodon* 'Sentimental Blue'. The list can go on and on so make sure you visit your local garden center and see what else catches your eye.

To capture some attention, here is a tip for you. Dare to be different! Besides using plants, dress up a border with collectables. At my house, I have a wonderful border of old antique watering cans. What a great look, not to mention, it is "green." Water cans capture rain water. Then I just water my pots with this captured liquid treasure. Sometimes, I even place water plants, such as water lettuce, in their open tops. Now I have my own miniature, low-maintenance water feature. To control mosquitoes just place a few cheap feeder fish in the water. They feast on insect larva.

You can also reuse bottles such as wine bottles for a border effect. This is the coolest look. Forget about cheap landscape lighting and spice up your yard at night with your own custom light fixtures. Just fill each bottle with miniature Christmas lights and then bury them in the ground so that the stem is under the soil. Wine bottles are ideal for this job but blue bottles look best!!!!!! These man-made lights are also great as a border in pots and especially in window boxes. Your neighbors will be soooooo jealous!!!!!! We love that don't we?

So the next time you visit a botanical garden or a beautiful landscaped home, go on "border patrol." Just maybe, you will see some variety of a new frontage plant. Better yet, just maybe, you can give them a tip or two!!!! So freshen up a weary garden by planting a beautiful border garden that gives a great and lasting first impression.

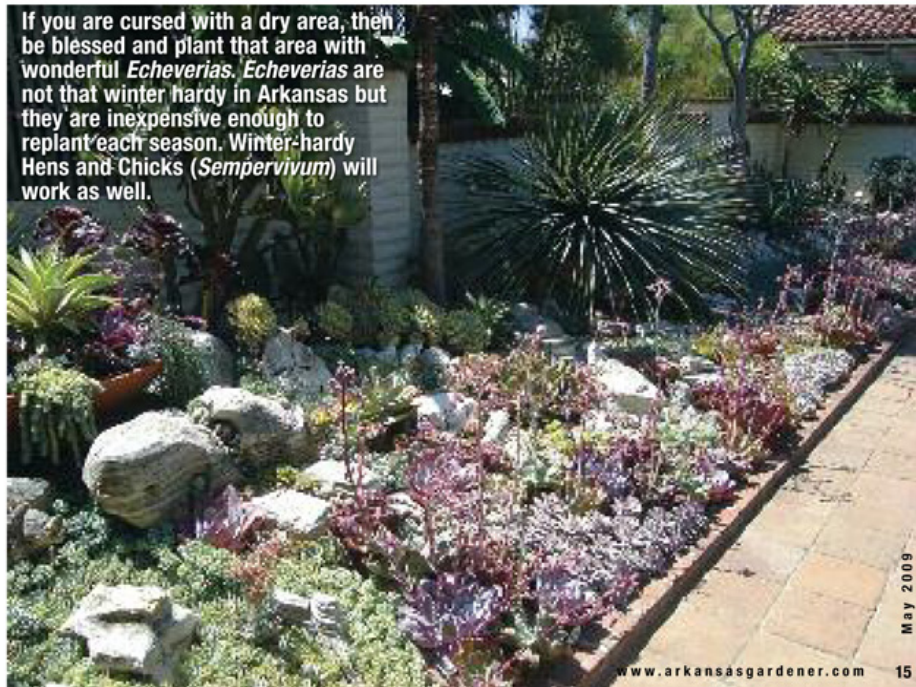
Happy Gardening! 🌱

Chris Olsen is the owner and landscape designer of Botanica Gardens in Little Rock. He is also a local TV personality in association with Today's THV 11. Check out his two new national DVD's at botanicagardens.com. For more information on Chris go to chrisholsen.com.

Besides plants, colorful chairs add life and uniqueness to a planted border.



If you are cursed with a dry area, then be blessed and plant that area with wonderful *Echeverias*. *Echeverias* are not that winter hardy in Arkansas but they are inexpensive enough to replant each season. Winter-hardy Hens and Chicks (*Sempervivum*) will work as well.



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