

# Mini-series episode 4 show notes and advice – beginner's guide to colour

## Episode Description

This episode is all about using colour in the garden. For both Sarah and Arthur, colour is incredibly important. They are both drawn to intense, saturated colours and this was part of how they came to know each other, after Arthur read and loved Sarah's book *The Bold and Brilliant Garden*.

There is no such thing as a wrong colour in the garden but there can be colour combinations that don't work. At Perch Hill, Sarah works with 4 colour palettes or families. She explains here how she uses them to create stunning pots and borders in the garden and to put together beautiful floral arrangements.

## In this episode, discover...

- Sarah's 4 colour palette families including dark and rich and boiled sweets
- Why the flowers in her soft and warm palette are like cashmere jerseys
- How to combine and contrast different palettes to avoid a razz-ma-tazz and riot of all colours
- Sarah's bride, bridesmaid and gate crasher recipe for perfect pots, borders and bunches of flowers
- Sarah and Arthur's favourite plants for each colour palette

Sarah has always been drawn to colour, even as a child. It is one of the reasons she became a gardener, along with a love of nature and seasonality. When she first started gardening, she was in slight danger of creating a garden of the liquorice all sorts brigade, with crazy colours in every direction. Her neighbour's garden was a bit like this and while she admired him greatly, she played it safe for her first garden, using tones of silver, mauve and blue, which she ultimately found boring.

When Sarah moved to Perch Hill, she was increasingly becoming drawn to using plants in velvety, enveloping, rich textural colours. Rich crimsons, deep purples, oranges, colours that wouldn't be out of place in a Venetian palazzo. These are the colours of her first palette:

### 1) Dark and rich

Rich – copper, mahogany, crimson, gold, deep velvet purples, vermilion orange — enveloping and comforting

These colours suck up the light — they are like velvet. I want to wrap myself in them, wear them as a party dress. They are classy, luscious, soft and strong.



## 2) Boiled sweet

The colours of boiled sweets — Purple, Blue, Brilliant-pink, Red, Orange, Bright-yellow and Acid-green. These are the translucent colours, like stained glass. They are joyful and light on their feet, but you need to take care not to get carried away with this lot. They can descend quickly into a primary school classroom jamboree.



The colours in this palette have a sharpness and brightness to them and look exactly like a jar of boiled sweets. They look beautiful scattered as highlights through flowers from the dark and rich palette, acting like a squeeze of lemon on smoked salmon, to enhance the overall effect.

This also applies to foliage. Arthur loves Venetian tones in his flowers and he uses acid green [Euphorbia oblongata](#) as his boiled sweet contrast. Or [Nicotiana 'Lime Green'](#) – good in shady places, or [Zinnia 'Benary's Giant Lime'](#). Palette 1 and 2 are the colour families Arthur likes working with to create exciting, stimulating combinations

The boiled sweet palette on their own can look too primary school painting or Ikea. A dash of sobriety from the dark and rich palette makes a great combination.

## How Sarah balances her colour palettes

Sarah has developed a method of using colour that evolved from her floristry teaching and how she would choose which flowers to arrange. She also uses this method for planning a

planting combination for a border or pot. If the main emphasis is dark and rich, then she'll add a scatter of boiled sweet, or vice versa.

- Bride

First she will look for her bride, the most sumptuous flower in the garden at that time, with a wow factor. Something like claret Dahlia 'Rip City'.

- Bridesmaid

Then she would pick a bridesmaid, something the same colour or similar to the bride, but a bit smaller, to back up her bride. A classic bridesmaid for 'Rip City' is [Cosmos 'Rubenza'](#).

- Gate crasher

Finally, she would go to another colour palette, in this case the boiled sweet palette, to add brilliance and contrast, like a fun, exciting gate crasher who livens up the party. For this combination she'd go for an orange dahlia, semi double ['Waltzing Mathilda'](#).

### Using white in the garden

The first two palettes have no white or almost no white. The next two palettes are mainly white, and are quite cool or soft pastels - not Arthur's favourites!

#### 3) Soft and warm

WARM is where pink, brown, crimson, coral and gold have all been mixed up a bit — and some white added. Included here are Soft-pink, Café-au-lait, Muted-crimson, Rust (You'll see this also appears in RICH), Faded-coral (which is a sort of Soft pink-orange), Soft-yellow, Apricot, (with more golden yellow in it than Peach, more orange than Soft Yellow), Peach and Ivory. These colours have next to no blue in them. That's what makes them look and feel warm in a planting. They're comforting, like a wool blanket. They're the cashmere cardigan colours which don't sparkle or challenge or threaten. They're slightly faded, slightly over, slightly past the best of themselves, the Late-Romantic, Oscar Wilde crew. They're very nice to be with and put together right, can be truly beautiful.



#### 4) Soft and cool

A whole set of colours are mixed with white and in most, quite a bit of blue. Everything becomes a cooler version of itself, so they look like sorbets.

In this family is Mauve, Cool-pink, Cool-blue, Silver, Soft-green, Primrose and White, going all the way from double cream to white in its purest form.

This is the freshest palette. It's crisp and clean. Just as in old banquets, people used to have a sorbet course to cleanse and refresh the taste in their mouths, these colours do that too.



Sarah tried these colours in her Farmhouse Garden but it's not a palette she responds to.

### **Favourite plants by colour palette**

#### **Dark and rich**

[Crocosmia 'Easy Lucifer'](#) – Arthur picks this easy to grow, late summer perennial with vibrant vermillion flowers.

[Cosmos 'Rubenza'](#) – the darkest, richest cosmos and Sarah's current favourite. Very easy to grow from seed.

[Dahlia 'Bishop of Auckland'](#) - the perfect dahlia, with velvety, crimson, single flowers and dark crimson leaves.

[Calceolaria 'Kentish Hero'](#) – striking dark rich mahogany velvet flowers all through the summer months, and good in shade and pots.

#### **Boiled sweet**

[Dahlia 'Blue Bayou'](#) – clear mauve purple flowers adored by butterflies.

[Papaver nudicale 'Champagne Bubbles'](#) – an Icelandic poppy that Sarah uses a lot in flower arrangements and scattered through garden for sharp highlight points. It comes in a beautiful mix of white, pink, yellow and various tones of orange. Flowering on and off for over six months, with great chiffon cup flowers which last well once cut.

#### **Soft and warm**

[Dahlia 'Mango Madness'](#) - Arthur loves to use this dahlia in the vase, with warm butterscotch, crème brûlée colours

[Phlox 'Crème Brûlée'](#) – great for a cut flower, every flower a slightly different mix of coffee mousse with a wash of cassis. Subtle, smoky and unbelievably pretty.

[Calendula 'Sunset Buff'](#) – an easy to grow garden plant, soft buff apricot flowers with a crimson reverse.

[Thunbergia 'African Sunset'](#) – Sarah's number one mainstay plant for this palette with flowers in all the colours of a spectacular sunset.

### **Soft and cool**

[Cosmos 'Purity'](#) - large, open flowers of pure white, with delicate apple-green foliage. The classic cut flower and a supremely lovely garden plant, which no one should be without.

[Sweet pea 'Aphrodite'](#) – popular with florists, a pure white, very floriferous sweet pea with lovely long stems and lots of flowers.

### **Find out more**

For more on Sarah's use of colour in the garden read her books:

*Bold and Brilliant Garden*

[\*A Year Full of Flowers: Gardening for all seasons\*](#)

Or Arthur's book:

[\*The Flower Yard\*](#)

You can also listen to [podcast episode 23 bold and brilliant colour](#)