Draw them in with fragrance

Source: Richard Durham, extension professor, Department of Horticulture

One of the most compelling aspects of a well-designed garden is easy to overlook on paper, and that is fragrance. From heady aromas to light scents, a fragrance carried on the breeze can lure people deeper into your garden to enjoy its beauty.

Flowers and herbs both can provide a lovely bouquet. Plant them along paths or near open windows, by your patio or in containers on your deck. In late spring, the sweet bay magnolia blooms release an evening perfume that, when near a window, can waft gently through your house.

Planting in clumps will give you the best fragrance. Spread your scented plants throughout your yard, nestling them into crooks and crannies where visitors can follow their noses to find the source of a particular aroma.

Some plants, like mint, release their scent when brushed against, so place those where folks pass close by. The summer-blooming perennial agastache, also known as hyssop, is a member of the mint family. Both its purple flower spikes and its leaves release an anise-flavored aroma.

Rosemary is also a member of the mint family. The shrubby herb can be used in cooking or just enjoyed for its woodsy scent in a container on the deck or mingled with other plantings in the garden. Originating in the Mediterranean region, it prefers hot, dry weather and is only marginally hardy in Kentucky. If you want to guarantee its survival through the winter, it may be best to pot it up and move it to a sheltered but sunny area like an unheated sunroom.

For a light, grassy scent, plant chamomile. The herb’s pretty, daisy-like flowers and its relaxing fragrance are an easy plant to add to either the flower or the herb garden.

Varieties of the annual nicotiana, known as flowering tobacco and sometimes jasmine tobacco, have a heavy, sweet scent that is strongest in the evening. If you’re planting for fragrance, plant the taller varieties.

Phlox paniculata or garden phlox has a potent scent on warm days. It’s best to buy these in bloom, so you can test their aroma. Many hybrids have had the scent bred out of them in exchange for larger flowers and enhanced disease resistance.

The sweet fragrance of yellow honeysuckle can bring back memories of summer days spent in the yard. Look for native varieties, like yellow or Scentsation, that can trail over archways or walls, rather than the invasive shrub varieties.

If you don’t plan on harvesting your thyme for cooking, consider planting it as a groundcover. When you walk on it, it releases the appealing scent of, well, thyme.

You will find many uses for lavender in your garden. English lavender is prized for its calming scent, as well as its edible flowers, which can be dried and used in teas, cakes and cookies. Lavenders require well drained soil. Adding compost or other organic matter to the soil is beneficial.

For more information about gardening for fragrance, contact the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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