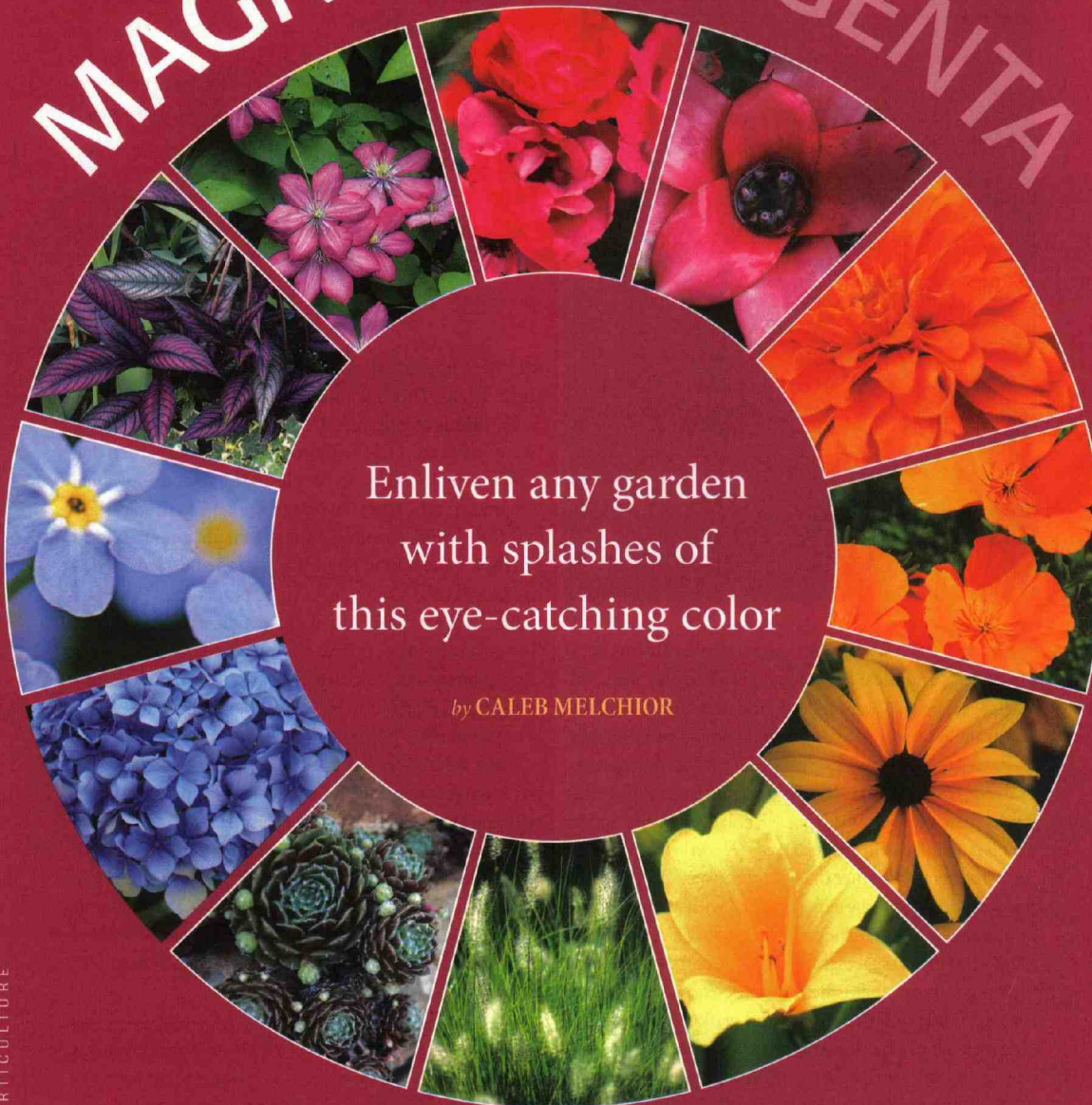


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MAGNETIC MAGENTA

Enliven any garden
with splashes of
this eye-catching color

by CALEB MELCHIOR



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Top to bottom: Chinese ground orchid (*Bletilla striata*) blooms in late spring, a breath of fresh air among the season's many pastels. 'Paul Neyron', a Bourbon rose, boasts both bold color and divine fragrance. 'Mariposa' coleus proves foliage can be just as exciting in color as the brightest flowers.

Magenta is loud. It's the friend you bring to keep things lively at a party. You can't hide it, you can't shut it up, and I, for one, wouldn't want to.

For me, magenta is the color of the Armenian cranesbill (*Geranium psilostemon*). It's a vibrant pink that leans heavily toward purple. The combination of red (short wavelengths) and violet (long wavelengths) in the light reflecting from the flower attracts the eye; the oscillation of light waves makes it hard to ignore this or any magenta flower.

As for the plant itself, Armenian cranesbill sprawls out from a central crown into a loose three-foot-wide mound. It blooms heavily throughout May and June. In addition to the species, various compact forms are available. At the nursery where I work, we've been impressed by the large flowers, vibrant color and heat tolerance of 'Dragon Heart'. It bloomed heavily throughout a brutal summer, despite being confined to gallon pots during 90°F, 80-percent humidity days.

PUNCH UP PASTELS

Like noisy friends at parties, magenta flowers have not always been welcome in gardens. Back when carefully considered harmonious schemes were the only accepted way of dealing with color, magenta's eye-catching qualities brought it scorn from garden tastemakers. Today, many gardeners have grown tired of purely harmonious plantings. Magenta can transform an everyday



scheme into something exciting. Two summers ago, we had a drift of 'Goldcrest' foxgloves (*Digitalis* 'Goldcrest') surrounded by 'Sandrine' perennial geranium (*Geranium* x'Sandrine'), a gold-leaved hybrid of Armenian cranesbill. The combination of the apricot-and-gold foxglove spikes with the soft lime geranium foliage was pleasant but uninteresting. When the geranium started blooming, however, its saturated magenta flowers shocked the whole composition to life. Visitors wandered off the path to see the combination more closely. 'Ann Folkard' and 'Anne Thompson' are two older forms of hardy geranium with gold leaves and small magenta flowers. 'Sandrine' stands out from these two because it has a stronger growth habit, larger flowers and more sun tolerance. It has performed excellently at the nursery.

Geraniums ramble around and create splashes of



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magenta at ground level. Chinese ground orchid (*Bletilla striata*), meanwhile, brings the party upward with its exquisite flowers on two- to three-foot stems above masses of pleated apple-green foliage. It, too, blooms in late spring, when gardens are usually filled with soft-colored lilacs, peonies and iris. There are multiple forms, some with variegated foliage, others with lighter flowers. From my experience, the species is the showiest and most reliable. *Bletilla* grows well in a variety of conditions, but it really thrives in moist soils and afternoon shade.

Perennial gladiolus (*Gladiolus communis* ssp. *byzantinus*) is another spiky magenta spring bloomer. Its petals glow like colored glass when they're lit from behind. Perennial gladiolus is narrow, so it can easily be slipped between fuller perennials, which will hide the gap when it dies down after flowering.

(*Lychnis coronaria*) singlehandedly proves this point, displaying its hot-pink flowers against its icy gray leaves. Old roses have long been underplanted with silver foliage plants. The Bourbon group contains numerous varieties with roses of the most saturated pink. 'Paul Neyron' is one of the most stunning. It is an awkward plant, with gawky stems, but its flowers are sensational, huge multipetaled affairs—like giant pompoms. Besides their vibrant color, they are richly fragrant. Unlike modern hybrids that bloom throughout the summer, Bourbon roses give a heavy flush of bloom in early summer and another, lighter flush in the fall. Put them in some otherwise neglected corner, surround with frosty wormwood (*Artemisia* 'Powis Castle') and enjoy the brilliance of magenta in a silver setting.

Magenta has a strong affinity for silver. Rose champion

BOLD BEDFELLOWS

For a more adventurous approach, surround magenta plants with other saturated colors that will cut through the steamy air of midsummer.

The intense colors of tropical vegetation—emerald green, piercing yellow, deep violet-blue—hold up to the attention-grabbing qualities of magenta and create memorable color combinations. Sometimes the contrasting



Left to right: 'Sandrine', a hardy geranium, offers the bright color of older cultivars like 'Anne Thompson', but it has larger flowers and more tolerance for sun. Tender 'Wendy's Wish' salvia stands out among the various red- or blue-flowered salvias available today. Rose champion (*Lychnis coronaria*) demonstrates all on its own the magic that can happen when magenta and silver are paired.



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Common name	Botanical name	What's magenta	Grow it
'DRAGON HEART' ARMENIAN GERANIUM	<i>Geranium</i> 'Dragon Heart'	Spring through summer flowers	Full sun to part shade. Medium water; drought tolerant once established. USDA Zones 4–8.
'SANDRINE' GERANIUM	<i>Geranium</i> 'Sandrine'	Early summer through early fall flowers	Full sun to part shade. Medium water; drought tolerant once established. Zones 4–8.
CHINESE GROUND ORCHID	<i>Bletilla striata</i>	Spring flowers	Part shade. Medium water; needs good drainage. Zones 5–9.
ROSE CAMPION	<i>Lychnis coronaria</i>	Late spring to early summer flowers	Full sun. Low to medium water; drought tolerant. Zones 4–8.
'PAUL NEYRON' ROSE	<i>Rosa</i> 'Paul Neyron'	Early summer and early fall flowers	Full sun. Medium water. Can be prone to foliar diseases in humid climates. Zones 5–9.
MAUVE DANCING LADIES	<i>Globba wintii</i>	Summer flowers	Part to full shade. Medium to high water with good drainage. Zones 8–11; rhizomes can be stored indoors in winter elsewhere.
'MARIPOSA' COLEUS	<i>Solenostemon scutellarioides</i> 'Mariposa'	Summer leaves	Part to full shade. Medium water. Zones 10–11 or grown as an annual.
'WENDY'S WISH' SALVIA	<i>Salvia</i> 'Wendy's Wish'	Summer to fall flowers	Full sun. Medium water. Zones 9–11 or grown as an annual.
'FASCINATION' DAHLIA	<i>Dahlia</i> 'Fascination'	Summer to fall flowers	Full sun to part shade. Medium water. Zones 7–10, elsewhere stored for the winter or grown as an annual.

Pair them with silver to bring out the richness of their coloring.

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This page, top to bottom: Perennial gladiolus (*Gladiolus communis* ssp. *byzantinus*) is tall and narrow, making it easy to slip magenta into a full garden. 'Dragon Heart' geranium has proven itself highly tolerant of heat and humidity. The dark leaves of 'Fascination' dahlia set off its bright flowers. Opposite page: *Globba wintii*, or mauve dancing ladies, has a delightful tropical feel.

For a more adventurous approach, surround magenta plants with other saturated colors that will cut through the steamy air of mid-summer.

Magenta mixtures

There are a number of kinds of color schemes that can be defined, but the simplest two to design are the analogous color scheme and the complementary color scheme. The former

uses colors that sit adjacent to each other on the color wheel; it creates a clean effect and can be soothing, especially with cool colors like blues and greens.

The latter uses colors that sit opposite one another and generally creates a bold, energetic look.

MAGENTA IN HARMONY

To create an analogous color scheme using magenta, try pairing it with any of these colors:

- **Red**—You may have heard the “rule” that red and pink clash, but magenta is close enough to red that it really doesn’t. Red and magenta tone each other down and seem to blend.

- **Purple**—Magenta and purple are very close relatives, so they make an easy pair. This combination can look very sophisticated; purple does well to tone down magenta’s more exuberant qualities.

- **Blue**—Magenta and blue blend well together to make a soothing picture. Blue can seem to recede into the background, so it benefits from a magenta neighbor that lends it some pop.



MAGENTA IN CONTRAST

To create a complementary color scheme using ma-

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color occurs within the flowerhead itself. The startlingly beautiful dancing ladies ginger (*Globba wintii*) has dangling chains of raspberry bracts with tiny yellow flowers shooting off like sparks. When I left my first small blooming specimen on the counter at the nursery, so many people asked to buy it that I had to secret it back to my own special stash. Not only is this ginger a beautiful thing, it grows easily in low light levels and thrives despite heat and humidity.

The most deeply saturated colors of the plant world occur in foliage. Take 'Mariposa' coleus. This giant variety has large spreading leaves in plum tones, lightly brushed with deep pink. To emphasize the magenta in its leaves, pair it with the tender salvia 'Wendy's Wish' (*Salvia* x 'Wendy's Wish'). 'Wendy's Wish' produces masses of crushed raspberry flowers on wiry purple stems. Its brighter color will draw out the richness of the pinks in the coleus's leaves.

You can plant a magenta flower against a deep purple background, or you can get the all-in-one effect with a plant that has both dark foliage and magenta flowers. We grew the dahlia 'Fascination' a few years ago and it was sensational. Dark foliage, sturdy stems and shocking pink flowers will stand out across even the busiest garden.

Magenta plants will change your garden. Like noisy friends, they can enliven dull afternoons and activate insipid environments. Pair them with silver to bring

out the richness of their coloring. Keep things exciting with sharp tropical contrasts. Make them glow against a dark background. Bring magenta to your garden and let the good times roll. ☘

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genta, try pairing it with any combination of these colors:

- **Yellow**—Not for the faint of heart, a yellow and magenta pairing begs to be noticed. Try this blend as a focal point in the garden or to mark an entryway, gate or turn in a path.

- **Gold**—The bright quality of gold contrasts with the darker tones of magenta, so both colors are intensified in this combination. It is a little easier on the eyes than yellow and magenta.

- **Lime green**—This combination is pure joy. It speaks of tropical locations and summer fun. You can even use it to brighten the shade—for example, mix shade-tolerant lime-green 'Wasabi' coleus, 'Gaucamole' hosta and any of the magenta-flowered hardy geraniums.

Magenta plants will change your garden. Like noisy friends, they can enliven dull afternoons and activate insipid environments.