

# From the garden

*They call it mellow*

# Yellow

I was watching the gold finches at the feeder, busily eating the sunflower seeds and chatting to each other about what a fine day it was. They were so easy to spot, that bright, sunshine yellow which is the reason they are often called canaries.

In the background, one of our native *Solidago* species appeared quite golden against the yellow of the finch, hence the common name, goldenrod. The entire scene had me contemplating the colour yellow and its impact in the garden setting.

Yellow is such an interesting colour in general. It is associated with warmth— think sunshine; weeds— think dandelions; and even wealth— think gold.

While it is said to be the happiest colour in the colour spectrum, it has negative associations. In 10th-century France, it was considered a cowardly colour and the doors of homes of criminals and traitors were painted yellow. Much later in history, it was the colour of the prisoners' armbands in Nazi concentration camps.

A dull dingy yellow is said to represent jealousy and according to a website on colour ([www.color-wheel-pro.com/color-meaning.html](http://www.color-wheel-pro.com/color-meaning.html)) men think yellow

to be a 'childish' colour so advertisers don't use it when marketing high-end products to the male population!

Fortunately, in our gardens, yellow is nothing but wonderful. Landscape and garden designers use yellow in many ways. The most important use is to advance the background. What I mean is this: yellow flowers appear to come forward in a garden.

The brightness of the colour for-shortens the visual distance to the flowers and can make a large space seem cozier. If you look at the photo with the goldenrod and the tree trunks you can see what I mean. The plants were more than 50 feet away and yet felt very close. The yellow even 'advances' to the

point where it looks closer than the violet coloured spikes in the centre of the picture.

Upon closer inspection of the goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) and the licorice hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) you can see the next role of the colour yellow in the garden, that of contrast. Yellow is one of the three primary colours of the colour wheel, the other two being red and blue. When red and blue are combined, they make violet or purple which is

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**Verbascum species florets**

the 'complementary' colour to yellow— that colour which creates the greatest contrast.

Garden writers usually say, 'Contrast is what gives POP to a garden'. It is that special quality that will make a section of a flowerbed scream 'look at me, look at me.' This contrast is not only seen when plants are combined in a garden. Often the contrast is a feature of a plant itself.

I found this contrast in miniature on the floret of a beautiful pale violet *Chirita* species. You can see the flower is just kissed by a spot of pale yellow, in complete contrast to the lovely violet. This *Chirita* is a newish plant to me.

A member of the Gesneriad family, cousin to the African violet, it hails from Asia and is fast becoming a popular houseplant as it is much more tolerant of the attentions of an average gardener than the African violet. Unfortunately, I lost the proper species names of this violet *Chirita* and the smaller version, seen here (**page 38**) on a window ledge with a beefsteak begonia, a succulent and a hoyo. The smaller of the two is the softest yellow imaginable sporting a golden lip.

Another scene in the garden demonstrating this colour contrast is a fall aster (**page 37**) alongside the goldenrod. Here we see the palest of blue overwhelmed by both the golden yellow of the goldenrod and the orange-yellow of the central disc of the aster. This particular species grows well on dry,



**Solidago canadensis (goldenrod) with agastache foeniculum (licorice hyssop)**

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