

perfect PARTNERS

Mix flowering perennials, annuals and bulbs into your rose beds for a colourful, year-round display. DERYN THORPE explains how to do it with style

Nothing looks more romantic than roses teamed with a mixture of flowering perennials in a relaxed, country-style garden. This beautiful combination provides foliage and flowers year round, even when the roses are dormant in winter, and it also helps to attract a range of beneficial insects to the garden.

While some gardeners prefer the look of a traditional rose bed, where no other plants are grown, I find this too regimented and sterile so I plant a variety of annual and perennial plants to create a naturalistic design.

Many rose growers, especially those who grow for the show bench, will tell you that roses prefer not to have anything planted with them as they dislike root competition. However, although they can struggle with the invasive roots of big trees and shrubs, they don't seem to suffer from a mixed arrangement of annuals and perennials, as long as you pay close attention to watering and nutrients.

The only disadvantage is that the maintenance of a 'cottage garden' can be time-consuming, as it needs regular tidying, mulching and replenishing to maintain the look, but it's well worth the effort.

designing your garden

What you choose to plant with roses depends on your taste. In my garden there are groundcovers and bulbs at their feet, and perennials and shrubs, smaller or a similar size to the roses, mixed into the garden bed.

Locate small plants at least 30cm from roses to avoid disturbing the roots and stop them getting tangled with rose canes. If they smother the rose base they can encourage diseases and pests, such as scale.

Perennials such as society garlic (*Tulbaghia violacea*), dwarf lavender, agapanthus and box can be used effectively as borders. Also, a single ►



IN HARMONY
 Clockwise, from right
 Rose and clematis climb
 up a post; roses and
 groundcovers around a
 small pond; catmint in
 flower; perennial daisy
Aster tongolensis
 'Berggarten'; perennial
 nemesia; oregano
 flowers; lamb's ears.
Previous page A lovely
 mix of catmint,
 cranesbill geranium and
 roses of varying heights
 and colours.



"Choose plants that are not invasive and complement the roses rather than compete with them visually"

perennial groundcover such as cat mint (*Nepeta* spp.), African daisy (*Osteospermum* spp.) or a cranesbill geranium (my favourites are *Geranium incanum* or *G.* 'Rozanne') provides a cohesive look when planted across the entire rose bed. This creates visual continuity throughout the bed, which is especially supportive when the planting scheme features several different-coloured roses.

Choose plants that are not invasive, and which complement the roses rather than compete with them visually. That's why I try to keep bright yellow-coloured coreopsis or yellow gaillardia confined to a bed with white and yellow roses (and lots of blue salvia), as I find the hue too strident to harmonise with my pink and mauve roses.

Foliage adds greenery to the garden, and winter-flowering perennials such as wallflowers (*Erysimum* spp.) and aurora daisy (*Arctotis* spp.) can provide colour when the roses are pruned and dormant.

On the edges of my rose borders, where the reticulation doesn't work well, I plant succulents. These plants are not good in the main areas as their leaves are too brittle for foot traffic, but I love the flowers and the foliage contrast of sedums 'Gold Mound', 'Autumn Joy' and 'Matrona', and *Kalanchoe fedtschenkoi* 'Variegata'.

top 10 picks

Perennials, annuals and bulbs all make lovely underplantings to roses. Scatter seeds of poppies, Queen Anne's lace and love-in-a mist in autumn, or plant drifts of bulbs such as spring starflower, ranunculus and anemone for a profusion of spring blooms. Here are some favourites.

- 1 **Bearded iris (*Iris* spp.)** Fan-like foliage and blooms in all colours. ☼ Late spring to summer ↑ 60cm–1m ↔ 10cm
- 2 **Dwarf Peruvian lily (*Alstroemeria* spp.)** Rhizome with lily-like flowers. ☼ Spring to autumn ↑ 30–50cm ↔ 40cm ✓ 'Princess Lily' range.
- 3 **Lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*)** Silver, furry foliage with lilac flower spikes to 50cm. ☼ Late spring to summer ↑ 25cm ↔ 40cm
- 4 **Catmint (*Nepeta* spp.)** Grey-green foliage and blue flower spikes. ☼ Spring to autumn ↑ 25–60cm ↔ 30–60cm ✓ 'Walker's Blue', 'Walker's Low', 'Little Titch'.
- 5 **Ornamental oregano (*Origanum* spp.)** Purple-pink flower heads and bracts. ☼ Summer to autumn. ↑ 20–60cm ↔ 60cm–1m ✓ 'Rosenkuppel', 'Bellissimo'.
- 6 **Dianthus (*Dianthus* spp.)** Fragrant double blooms in pinks, red and white with linear, silver foliage. ☼ Autumn and spring ↑ 30–50cm ↔ 50–1m. ✓ 'Memories'.
- 7 **Perennial nemesia (*Nemesia* spp.)** Smothered in small flowers in most colours. Plants self-seed. ☼ Autumn to spring ↑ 45cm ↔ 60cm
- 8 **Michaelmas daisy (*Aster* spp.)** White, blue or pink, single and semi-double, daisy-like flowers. ☼ Summer and autumn. ↑ 40–110cm ↔ 40cm ✓ 'Little Boy Blue.'
- 9 **Tick seed (*Bidens ferulifolia*)** Scrambling groundcover with single or semi-double gold flowers. ↑ 20–25cm ↔ 30–40cm ✓ 'Tweety', 'Goldilocks Rocks'.
- 10 **Clematis (*Clematis* spp.)** Hybrid forms in blue, white and pink, flowers up to 18cm across, with climbing roses. ☼ Spring, summer or autumn ↑ 1–4m ↔ 40cm ✓ 'Arctic Queen', 'Crystal Fountain'.

KEY: ☼ flowering time ↑ height ↔ width ✓ good cultivars



PHOTOS LEIGH CLAPP, STOCK, ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES, PMA

My favourite perennials for rose borders are salvias, as they come in a wide range of forms and many have blue or purple flowers, which team especially well with roses of every shade. The *Salvia* 'Wish' range is long-flowering, and plants grow to about 80cm tall and wide, with blooms and bracts in shades of pink and mauve.

For blue-purple flowers on compact bushes to 50cm tall and wide, look for salvias 'Impact Purple', 'May Night' and 'Blue Hills'. If you're growing some of the bigger shrub roses, you can include purple-flowered 'Anthony Parker' or 'Waverley', which flowers year-round with long stems of soft pink flowers with a dark purple calyx. Both grow to about 1.2m with a slightly wider spread. All salvias have nectar that attracts lots of small birds, and the flower spikes can be cut for the vase.

In my garden I team plants with roses to create a harmonious scene. Climbing roses and hybrid clematis are perfect partners, and there are clematis that scramble through climbers and shrub roses.

One of the best combinations in my garden is the hot pink-flowered 'Climbing China Doll' rose, which grows on swagged pillars, and *Clematis* 'Warsaw Nike', with its velvety purple blooms.

The heritage rose 'Reine de Violettes', grown as a climber and wound around a pine pole, has the purple-black day lily 'Vino Di Notte' at its feet. Each spring they flower in unison – a dramatic symphony of moody purple, taking this small pocket of my garden to a new level of artistry. **GA**