

## True Blue

Since childhood, I have loved cool, bright colors, those that are grouped together on the color wheel opposite red, yellow and orange. It is no surprise that my flower garden palette tends to purple and blue.

In nature, blue is considered the rarest color even though it is the color most favored by humans across many cultures. It is estimated that, of all the colors plants utilize to attract pollinators, blue occurs in less than 10% of the 280,000 species of flowering plants. Among scientists who specialize in color analysis, it is commonly understood that there has never been a true blue flower and there will not likely be one. Why? There is no blue pigment in the plant kingdom and colors that appear to be blue are actually variations of violet or purple. Plant breeders are anxious to develop blue flowers for the nursery trade. Most recently progress was made with chrysanthemums and roses in Japan, but the resulting flowers are more purple than blue.

There are two ways a flower can be blue-looking. The first is at the chemical level. The key ingredients for making blue flowers are the red anthocyanin pigments. According to David Lee, author of ["Nature's Palette: The Science of Plant Color"](#) "Plants tweak, or modify, the red anthocyanin pigments to make blue flowers," Lee said. "They do this through a variety of modifications involving pH shifts and mixing of pigments, molecules and ions. The second, less common way is structural, where the blue color is produced by refracted light such a shiny African berry called *Polli*."

In my small, sunny front yard in Puyallup, my annual blue adventure in the garden starts with *Pulmonaria* (lungwort) in March. Their multi-colored flowers consist of tiny blue, purple and pink blossoms. Some of my hyacinthus are also almost blue. Soon after, a blanket of sky blue forget-me-not (*Myosotis*) fills every bed. I simply let some plants mature and shake them over my soil in mid-summer to insure future blueness. Meanwhile, I plant Heavenly Blue morning glory (*Ipomoea*) next to my front

door and wait. Midsummer sends me my bluest and truest flowers including a 15 year-old delphinium with spires nearly six feet tall and a mophead hydrangea that is bluer than any of its kin. Smaller blue treasures include early Japanese iris, amsonia 'Blue Ice', borage, annual bachelor buttons, nigella and sky blue lobelia. As summer wains, I wait patiently as the morning glory climbs upward and rejoice the morning the first blossom unfurls, its glowing throat like the sun surrounded by the bluest sky.

This fall, I moved to Tumwater from Puyallup to a house with a huge mature garden. The first thing I did was buy a giant bag of forget me not seeds and scattered them liberally in the front bed. Come April, my new neighbors will know I am true blue.



Clockwise from top left:  
Forget me nots, nigella,  
hydrangea, delphinium and  
morning glory in my garden.