# Color Collective -- Seattle!

This is an invitation to connect with nature by capturing the colors of your garden in a simple color study. This is not botanical illustration—we'll leave that to the experts—but an exercise in learning to see.

As you begin recording colors found in your garden, or the park, or really any little fragment of the natural world, try to approach each study with fresh eyes. Forget, even if just for a moment, what you think you know. A red rose, a green leaf, even a humble radish all contain myriad subtleties. There a delightful feedback loop to identifying color. The more we look, the more we see. Think of it as a way of befriending your attention.

The Nature of Color

Let's start with a very brief look at the nature of color.
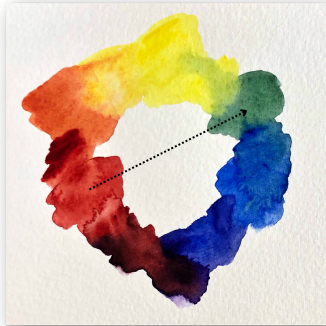
A color wheel is an abstract depiction of a color's relationship with other colors. **Blue**, **red**, and **yellow** are known as primary colors—that is, they are made only of themselves and often referred to as the building blocks of all other colors. Secondary colors are what you get when you mix two primary colors together, for instance, blue + red = **purple**; blue + yellow = **green**; red + yellow = **orange**. And that's only the beginning of countless colors you can create with mixing. Complementary colors appear opposite each other on the color wheel—**red** and **green** for instance. Optically, complementary colors vibrate with intensity when placed next to each other. But when mixed together, complementary hues diffuse one another, shifting and nudging colors in wonderful directions.

While these paint box definitions of colors are tidy, attempting to work with them quickly exposes the gap between theory and practice. Color in nature is rarely pure. It's only when we venture beyond the scope of a color wheel and let our paints mix and blend that we can begin to see—and capture—abundant color.
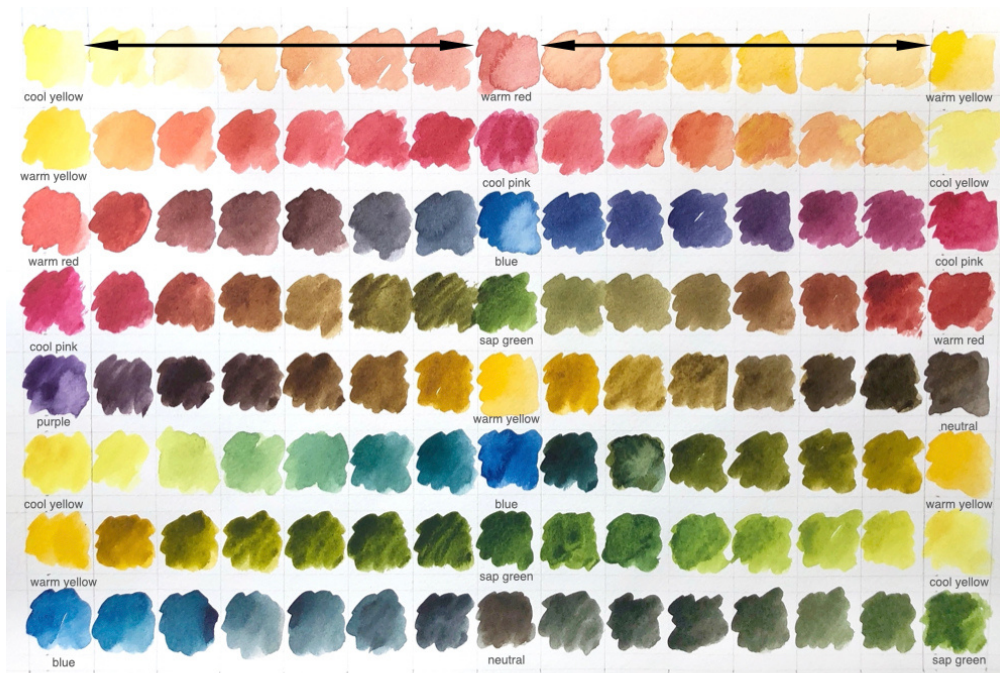
The Name Game

Typically a color is defined...by its color. A generally accepted, if somewhat circular, logic lacking scientific rigor, imagination, and romance, in my humble opinion. Have you ever tried to remember a color? It's nearly impossible. But when color, memory and association collide, our fluency with color improves. And for that we need language.

Naming expands and specifies our perception of color. For instance, if you say "**orange**," we both probably picture an orange that is the color of an orange. But if you say "peach," "melon," or "pumpkin," all of a sudden you've helped me to "see" various expressions of what is still basically orange. I never tire of this word game that, along with my color studies, deepens my appreciation for degrees of color.

Let's Get Started

Decide what you're going to paint but don't overthink it—anything that will fit on your paper is fair game.

Now, look at the colors in your botanical and ask yourself, are they warm or cool. I don't mean a literal temperature reading—just the overall cast of the hue. A warm color leans toward yellow—think of the warmth of the sun. In contrast, a cool color leans blue—I find it helps to think of the chill of the night.

When in doubt as to whether a color is warm or cool, it helps to compare it to another version of itself. Look closely at the color study of this **rose**. The plant's petals contain both warm and cool versions of pink; check out the top two left hand squares to see what I mean.

Language helps to clarify and distinguish nuance. Warm pink flushes with blush, coral, and melon, with a golden sunlit cast. Cool pink leans toward dianthus or cherry blossom—a chill shift toward blue.

Test your colors on a scrap of watercolor paper as you mix them and hold your botanical up next to those little daubs and swatches to see if you're headed in the right direction. Once you're satisfied with a color, lay down a swatch on the paper of your color study to record your observation. Repeat the process as you move on to the next color. And the next.

I create my color studies in watercolor, but you may decide to work in collage, color pencil, or simply explore color by playing with botanicals. Whatever medium you choose, don't belabor a color that's not working, or you'll end up with a muddy mix. Color can't be forced. Over the years that I've been creating these color studies I've come to the rather obvious conclusion that Mother Nature does this so much better than I ever will.

Mother Nature does this so much better than I ever will.

Wasn't That Fun?

Typically, I label my finished color study with the name of the plant, a personal observation that captures my mood that day, or something about the colors.

Then, I document the day by snapping a photo of the botanical on top of my completed painting once it's dried. This is an excellent way to check your work; a camera (and by camera, I mean smart phone) objectively captures what's there, instead of what we think we're seeing.

The photos become a record, a journal of sorts, tracking color, bloom, and season.

Snap a pic and share your colors @Chelseafringe #chelseafringecolorcollective. Tag @gardenercook to connect your garden to mine
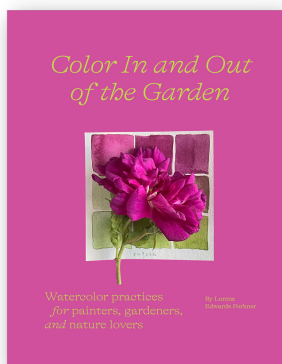

Lorene Edwards Forkner is a gardener, a writer, and an artist. She writes a weekly garden column for *Pacific NW Magazine* that appears in *The Seattle Times*.

The materials for this exercise have been adapted from her latest book, **Color In and Out of the Garden**. Find Lorene online ahandmadegarden.com and @gardenercook.

21st to 29th May 2022
The alternative garden festival
www.chelseafringe.com
@chelseafringe

Color In and Out of the Garden, Watercolor Practices for Painters, Gardeners, and Nature Lovers
by Lorene Edwards Forkner
Abrams, 2022

This book is an invitation to look closely with great heart and pay attention to life. Delightfully useful and addictively readable, this little book offers readers practical advice, mindful inspiration and welcome garden respite from everyday stress, all laid out in the colors of the rainbow.