Understanding the Principles of Floral Design

You have probably seen a floral design that inspired awe. Beautiful floral designs are pieces of art. Beauty is defined by rules or principles of art. Follow the principles of art, and you, too, can create beautiful designs.

Objective:

Analyze the principles of floral design.

Key Terms:

- asymmetrical balance
- balance
- centering
- contrast
- counterbalancing
- dominance
- floral design
- focal point
- free, variable rhythm
- physical balance
- principles of design
- proportion
- radiation
- regular, repeated rhythm
- repetition
- rhythm
- symmetrical balance
- transition
- variety
- visual balance
- visual weight

Principles of Floral Design

Floral design is the art of organizing the design elements inherent in plant materials and accessories according to principles of design art. People who arrange flowers typically use floral design techniques.

Principles of design are guidelines used by the floral designer to create a beautiful composition. The use of these rules promotes beautiful, artistic arrangements. Major principles include proportion, balance, rhythm, and dominance.
**Proportion**

Proportion is the pleasing relationship between size and shape among objects and parts of objects. In floral design, three aspects determine proportion: the location of the arrangement, the height of the arrangement, and the materials used in the arrangement.

**Display Area**

The design must be in proportion to where it is going to be displayed. The display area could involve a room, a table, or sometimes a person wearing the design. Proportion requires that the design be suitable for and in harmony with its location.

**Height of the Arrangement**

The height of an arrangement should be at least 1 1/2 times the height of its container’s greatest dimension. There are a few exceptions to this rule, including the idea that height may be increased to create proper dimension with the room. Another increase might be because of the materials with which the designer is working.

The container is a primary factor in determining appropriate height. Four aspects that need to be considered are the container’s physical dimensions, its color, its material and texture, and its shape.

A heavy, dark container will support a taller arrangement, whereas a glass container will provide an excellent base for a shorter arrangement.

An exception to the height rule applies to centerpieces and horizontal arrangements. A centerpiece should not obstruct the view of people participating in a dinner conversation; therefore, the arrangement needs to be kept...
low. A horizontal arrangement is short, but its linear dimension should be at least 1½ times the size of the container.

**Flowers and Foliage**

Using flowers and foliage of equal or nearly equal size will help in achieving proper proportion. Large jumps in flower size within an arrangement should be avoided. For example, large mums should not be mixed with baby's breath.

**BALANCE**

**Balance** in a flower arrangement refers to the arrangement’s equilibrium and equality in weight, both physical and visual. Balance can be achieved through several different methods.

**Physical Balance**

Physical balance is the actual stability of plant materials within a container. A properly designed arrangement that has physical balance will not fall over and can stand freely on its own.

**Visual Balance**

Visual balance is the perception of an arrangement being balanced—that is, being of equal weight on both sides of the central axis. A design that is not visually balanced will bother the viewer much like a crooked painting on a wall. Visual balance should be evident from three
views: side to side; top to bottom; and front to back. Two types of visual balance are symmetrical and asymmetrical.

**Symmetrical balance** is present when a design has equal material placements and weight on both sides of its central axis. Symmetrical balance is historically European in style and often called formal balance. Typically, symmetrical arrangements are exhibited in formal, or symmetrical, settings. Examples of symmetrical designs are oval, round, fan, triangle, inverted-T, and vertical arrangements, as well as oval and round centerpieces.

**Asymmetrical balance** is present when a design has material placements and weight that are not equal on both sides of its central axis. This is often called informal design and stems from Asian influences. Asymmetrical balance is achieved through compensation and counterbalancing. Examples of asymmetrical designs are crescent, Hogarth curve, fan, diagonal, vertical, ikebana, scalene, and right triangle. Asymmetrically balanced centerpieces are common.

**Achieving Balance**

Designers use three main techniques to help achieve balance.

**Visual weight** is a flower’s perceived lightness or heaviness based on its color, shape, and pattern. Varying visual weight helps achieve the compensation or counterbalancing in asymmetrical designs. Lighter materials and color are used toward the outside of an arrangement, whereas heavier materials are used toward the center.

**Centering** is the technique of placing dominant plant material along a design’s central vertical axis. This allows heavier plant materials to be placed higher in a design.

**Counterbalancing** is the practice of balancing plant materials on one side of a design with visually equal materials on the opposite side. This technique is essential in asymmetrical design work and can be used to avoid strict mirror imaging in symmetrical work.

**RHYTHM**

**Rhythm** is the orderly organization of design elements to create a visual pathway. An arrangement with good rhythm will cause the viewer to look at the entire arrangement. There are two types of rhythm. **Regular, repeated rhythm** is present when materials are repeated at regular intervals from the top to the bottom of an arrangement. **Free, variable rhythm** is an unstructured style with subtle flowing movements created with unstructured materials.
Five techniques can be used to achieve both regular and free rhythm: radiation, repetition, transition, variety, and contrast.

**Radiation** is characterized by stems that radiate naturally from the container. A top view shows the stems appearing as spokes on a wheel. Crossing stems is avoided.

**Repetition** is accomplished by repeating design elements throughout an arrangement to create unity in the work. It may include color, shape, space, and lines.

**Transition** is the change from one material to another. It should be smooth and gradual. Lighter flowers near the container edge blend into the heavier ones near the center.

**Variety** is created by using a diverse assortment and different components in a design. Variety focuses attention and stimulates interest and imagination.

**Contrast** describes objects that have striking differences beyond mere variety or diversity. Contrast takes variety to a higher degree.

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**FIGURE 6.** The yucca plant is an example of perfect radiation.

**FIGURE 7.** Rhythmic change through transition refers to grading flowers from small to large, from light to dark, from linear to oval to round, and from more spacious to more clustered.
**DOMINANCE**

*Dominance* in a design means that one design element is more prevalent or noticeable, thereby capturing interest of the viewer. The use of dominance suggests to the viewer what is important in a design. Interest and attention are captured when one feature dominates and others are secondary. Dominance can be achieved by using dominant plant material, an emphasized design element, a distinct style of design, a theme, or a focal point. Large flowers, coarse-textured flowers, and bright-colored flowers often appear as dominant floral elements.

**Focal Point**

A *focal point* is a center of interest. It can be created several different ways. Not all arrangements need a focal point or center of interest. If, however, one is intended, there are a number of methods to create one:

- Use of large flowers
- Use of special-form flowers, such as orchids
- Use of dark shades
- Variation of concentration of plant material
- Use of framing materials
- Use of strong color contrast
- Radiation of plant materials to a particular area
- Use of accessories

**Summary:**

Principles of design are guidelines used to create beautiful compositions. Major principles include proportion, balance, rhythm, and dominance.

Proportion is determined by the location of the arrangement, the height of the arrangement, and the materials used in the arrangement.

Balance refers to equality in weight, both physical and visual. Physical balance is the stability of plant materials within a container. Visual balance is the perception of equal weight on both sides of the central axis. Visual balance may be symmetrical or asymmetrical.

Creating a pathway for the eye to follow is the purpose of rhythm. Two types of rhythm are regular, repeated rhythm and free, variable rhythm.

Dominance suggests to the viewer what is important in a design. Dominance can be achieved with plant material, an emphasized design element, a distinct style of design, a theme, or a focal point. A focal point is a center of interest.
Checking Your Knowledge:

1. What are principles of design?
2. What is proportion?
3. What is balance?
4. What is rhythm?
5. What is dominance?

Expanding Your Knowledge:

Analyze live arrangements or those in photographs based on the principles of design discussed in this unit. Ask whether the designs have proportion, balance, rhythm, and dominance. If so, how are they achieved?

Web Links:

Principles of Design
http://www.floraldesigninstitute.com/page004.09.02.00.htm
http://flowerscanada.org/content/en/principles_of_design.htm

Principles of Design (PowerPoint presentation)

Theories and Principles of Design
http://www.milwaukeeschoolofflowerdesign.com/principles-flower-design.htm