

Chocolate Gardens

Sharon Allen wanted to learn more about planting a Chocolate Garden after watching an HGTV program that described this niche gardening style. Chocolate Gardens are all about plants and flowers that come in various shades of brown from beige to burgundy to almost black. An HGTV web video illustrates the wide variety of plants that can be incorporated into Chocolate Gardens (<http://vimeo.com/1946870>) based on a tour through the Chocolate Flower Farm located in Washington. It is the only nursery to specialize in chocolate colored and scented plants. Sharon led us through a sampling of the offerings highlighted by HGTV:

Diablo ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Summer Wine') is a deciduous shrub with chocolate-colored foliage. It spreads by underground runners but is generally not invasive. Pinkish-white blooms form in early summer. Once it has finished blooming, clusters of red seed pods form that are quite stunning against the dark foliage. Its exfoliating bark can be enjoyed in the winter. Use it in the back of a perennial border, as a medium-sized hedge or in mass plantings. Grows to eight feet tall and wide. Plant it in a moist, well-draining soil and in full sun to partial shade. Drought tolerant. Also consider the cultivar 'Diablo' (also called 'Monlo'). Hardy to USDA Zones 2 to 7.



Korean angelica (*Angelica gigas*) is a stunning, chocolate-colored biennial. It produces only foliage in the first year, but during the second year, large clusters of dark-purple flowers appear on tall, similarly colored stems in summertime. Attracts bees. Use it in the middle to the back of a perennial border. Plants reach four to six feet tall. Plant angelica in a moist, well-draining soil and in full sun to partial shade.

Hardy to USDA Zones 4 to 10.

Purple fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum') has deep plum-colored foliage all season long. Feathery plumes appear in late summer. Use it in the middle of a perennial border or grow it in containers. Plants reach up to three to four feet tall and about half as wide. It grows best in moist, well-draining soil and full sun. Drought tolerant. This cultivar of fountain grass is tender, so in many parts of the country it's treated as an annual. Hardy to USDA Zones 9 to 10.



New Zealand flax (*Phormium* 'Platt's Black'). Not to be confused with purple fountain grass, this flax has wide, almost rigid, almost-black blades. Use it in the middle to back of a perennial border or plant it in containers. Grows to four feet tall and as wide. Plant it in full sun and a moist, well-draining soil. Drought tolerant.

Hardy to USDA Zones (8)9 to 10.

The genus Carex offers a variety of chocolate- and toffee-colored ornamental grasses, such as *C. comans* 'Milk Chocolate', *C. tenuiculmis* 'Cappuccino' and *C. flagellifera* 'Toffee Twist'. All of these sedges are coppery brown and appear almost dead. Use in containers or plant *en masse* in the front of a perennial border. Plants are about one to two feet tall and as wide. Grow in a moist, well-draining soil and in full sun to light shade. Hardy to USDA Zones 7 to 10.



Australia canna (*Canna* 'Australia'). This tropical plant is certainly a conversation piece in the garden, especially when its stunning scarlet-red flowers are open in contrast with the dark-reddish-brown foliage. The chocolaty foliage adds height to the back of a perennial border. In cooler climates, dig and store plants indoors for the winter. Plants grow to five feet tall and about half as wide. Grow it in full sun

and a moist, well-draining soil. Hardy to USDA Zones 7 to 10.

Black sunflower (*Helianthus*, selected cultivars). This sunflower adds a burst of dark red at tall heights. Plants reach up to six feet. Consider using cultivars such as 'Moulin Rouge,' 'Prado Red' or 'Velvet Queen.'

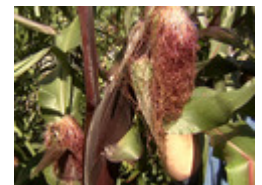


Chocolate cosmos (*Cosmos atrosanguineus*). With very few plants quite like it, chocolate cosmos produces deep-burgundy-red flowers that emit an aroma of chocolate. It grows to two to three feet tall and wide. Use it in the front to middle of a perennial border where the fragrance can be enjoyed. It also makes an excellent addition to a cut flower garden. Plant in a moist, well-draining soil and in full sun. It may require staking. In cooler climates, this tender perennial can be dug and stored like tender bulbs. Hardy to USDA Zones (7)8 to 10.

Chocolate daisy (*Berlandiera lyrata*). In close competition with chocolate cosmos, the chocolate daisy rivals the chocolaty scent. The little yellow, daisy-like flowers open up at night and release the fragrance in the morning. Plant it in the front of a perennial border where the fragrance can be enjoyed and use the dried seed pods in arrangements. Plants grow to about one foot tall and wide. Plant in full sun and a moist, well-draining soil, although it's tolerant of a range of soil conditions. Drought tolerant. Insect-friendly plant. Hardy to USDA Zones 4 to 10.



Chocolate cherry tomato (*Lycopersicon* 'Chocolate Cherry'). Don't be fooled by this one! Chocolate cherry tomato does, in fact, taste like a flavorful cherry tomato, but the brown hue of the cute little fruits gives them the look of shiny chocolate-covered tomatoes. Treat as an annual crop.



Chocolate corn (*Zea mays* 'Mayes Double Red'). From the stems and husks to the ears of the corn, this cultivar has an unusual deep red color. Use it in dried arrangements. It's also edible but doesn't taste like chocolate. Treat as an annual crop.



Delphinium elatum ('Kissed by Chocolate') Elegant white with gentle brushes of chocolate gave this strain the name, 'Kissed by Chocolate'. These English Delphiniums are taller, sturdier and more disease resistant than the more common Pacific Giants. 6'-8' tall. Sun to sun/pt shade. Zones 3-10.

Eupatorium rugosa is an easy-to-grow beauty that attracts butterflies, but not deer or rabbits. Very attractive, dark bronzy-brown leaves provide a backdrop for an autumn display of fuzzy white flower clusters. It's useful in shady situations and will even tolerate dry shade under deciduous trees once plants are established. Both the foliage and flowers are useful for cutting. Zone 5-9. Sun/Part Shade/Full Shade. 35"-47" tall, 29"-35" spread.



'Sweet Hot Chocolate' Daylily (*Hemerocallis*) Daylilies are favorites of many gardeners, but this burgundy-brown variety will add a touch of magic to any grouping. First hybridized in 1956, 'Sweet Hot Chocolate' is a mid-season rebloomer reaching 18-24 inches in height. Sun to partial shade. Zone 5-10.



Oriental Poppy (*Papaver paeoniflorum* 'Black Peony') Big double blooms are heavily set with tight ruffled petals. These stunning dark purple peony-shaped flowers reach 5 inches across! Black Peony's radiant color grows to 4 feet. These poppies are graced with abundant foliage and will bloom from mid to late-summer. The season can be extended if they are kept dead-headed. Will self sow. Zone 2-9.

Sharon pointed out that many other varieties of chocolate colored and chocolate scented plants and seeds can be found online and in catalogs. Just google "chocolate flower," "chocolate plant," or "chocolate garden" to see what's out there. A few sites to whet your sweet tooth:

Chocolate Flower Farm (Washington State) <http://www.chocolateflowerfarm.com/>

Plant a Chocolate Lover's Garden <http://www.diyilife.com/2008/05/23/plant-a-chocolate-lovers-garden/>

Chocolate Flowers for Your Garden <http://www.sensationalcolor.com/color-for-your-home-garden/outdoor-living/chocolate-flowers-for-your-garden.html>

Brown is Beautiful http://www.debraprinzing.com/articles.php?article_id=67

Chocolate Scented Gardens <http://dyingforchocolate.blogspot.com/2009/08/chocolate-scented-gardens.html>

Now grab a Hershey Bar and start dreaming!