




Get Growin'!

The benefits of gardening extend way beyond your flower box or planting area. A garden can contribute to the overall landscaping and curb appeal of your home—resulting in the value of your house blossoming by as much as 7 to 15 percent. So, whether you have an acre, a border or a patch, try some of these helpful tips for planning and planting your garden.

STEPS FOR PLANNING YOUR GARDEN

Before you buy seeds or start digging, make a bloomin' plan! Refer to "Elements of a Flower Garden" (at right) and think about how these elements might work in your space. Find other gardens you like and see how they balance these elements. Ask your real estate agent what exciting new gardens they've seen and can refer you to for ideas. When you're ready, follow these steps:

- 1. Sketch out your existing yard**, including the intended planting areas, decks, trees, slopes, fences, walkways, etc. Don't worry if your drawing isn't suitable for framing! Make sure you have actual dimensions and note them in the sketch.
 - 2. Plan trees first**, as they provide focal points for your yard or garden. You may want shade trees that provide colorful foliage in fall, or elegant flowering trees, usually smaller, that bloom in spring or summer.
 - 3. Next come plants that give year-round structure to the garden**, such as large bushes and shrubs. Garden art, pathways, and low walls or borders of brick, stone or wood, can also provide structure, especially in a garden's bare months.
 - 4. Now incorporate the decorative flowering shrubs and grasses.** These might be used to screen plain garage walls or compost heaps, as dividers between garden segments, or as attractive accents to frame the garden.
 - 5. Finish off with perennials, bulbs, and annuals.** In the typical border garden bed, perennials give the garden shape, with bulbs providing early spring color and annuals the later spring and summer accents. Note varieties, colors and bloom times in your sketch.
 - 6. Finally, it's time to scout nurseries!** Seed packages and flats tell requirements for climate, soil, sun and shade, temperature and planting distance, as do seed catalogs.
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ELEMENTS OF A FLOWER GARDEN



DESIGN

Color: Mass plantings of single hues create a swath of moving color. Grouping by variety, with several colors mixed together is another good option. Cool colors such as blue, green and purple wash out in bright light; these colors work best in shaded areas.

Size: Plant tall flowers in the back of the bed (or center, if the garden is viewed from both sides), and grade down to the front with medium and then short flowers. Buy seedlings for their mature, not current, height.

Bloom span: Choose plants with a mix of blooming times and seasons to keep color in the garden longer.



PLANT TYPES

Trees & shrubs: These boldly outline a garden or provide accent in an expanse of lawn. Flowering trees blossom in spring or summer and may have bright fall foliage.

Annuals: Must be planted yearly, although some annuals reseed themselves. Most bloom all summer, so plant them around perennials to keep colors going from spring to fall.

Perennials: Return yearly, making for easier garden care. Typically bloom for a month or two in spring or summer. Be patient, as they develop more slowly than annuals.

Bulbs: First to show in spring, but the blooms are relatively short-lived. Bulbs can be kept in the ground with minimum protection or kept in pots for easy moving and arranging.



GROWING CONDITIONS

Sun & shade: Most flowers need at least half a day of full sun, but if you have shady areas, choose shade-tolerant varieties.

Climate: Make sure flowers are compatible with your zone and climate (check seed packets or catalogs or an online site such as www.growit.com/ZONES/).



Soil, water, sun and a bit of TLC—with just a few easy ingredients, you can grow a garden. Don't be discouraged by a tiny plot or lack of experience. Here are tips that will help you get goin' and growin'!

Best Laid Plans

TIPS FOR PLANTING AND GROWING A GARDEN OF DELIGHTS

SOIL

- Bad dirt is the top problem for gardeners. Good soil provides nutrients and drainage.
- Use a soil tester, sold in garden stores, to check pH balance and levels of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.
- Supplement soil with slow-release fertilizer or organic amendments such as peat moss or compost. Digging in amendments also helps improve drainage.
- Get rid of grass and weeds in planting area. Rototilling helps remove unwanted growth and also aerates the soil for better drainage.
- Preparing good soil for planting cuts back on maintenance later.

TREES

- Trees with deep roots allow lawns and groundcovers to grow at their base.
- Deciduous trees give your yard focal points of size and fall color.
- Flowering trees add delicate color in spring and summer and many provide bright foliage in fall.

YEAR-ROUND PLANTS

- Evergreen shrubs hide unwanted views, define spaces, and accent seasonal gardens. For easy care, choose dwarf shrubs that grow slowly and stay neat.
- Deciduous and needled evergreen shrubs like sun. Broad-leaf evergreens do well in shade.
- Garden art such as birdbaths, statuary, and sundials can also provide structure in winter and interesting focal points in summer months.

DECORATIVE SHRUBS & GRASSES

- Use flowering shrubs and decorative grasses to separate and screen.
- Placed within or around a flower garden, shrubs and grasses offer variety in size, texture and color.
- Consider enclosing your vegetable garden with a border of decorative berry bushes and dwarf fruit trees.

FLOWERS

- Be selective—choose varieties such as long bloomers for maximum color, and annuals that don't require clipping dead flowers in order to keep them blooming.
- Plant bulbs in plastic pots and put the pot in larger planters. When blooms are gone, switch out the pot for one with planted annuals.
- Gladiola, Dahlia and Canna bulbs don't have to be dug up and stored. Instead, cover them with a tarp and layer over a mulch of leaves 6 inches deep until spring.
- A variety of drought tolerant plants, such as the Autumn Joy sedum, produce colorful flowers with less moisture in dry climates. For more information, visit www.sunset.com.

MAINTENANCE

- Develop a watering routine. Water deeply once a week rather than shallowly several times a week. Never water in the heat of the day.
- Organic compost or bark chips feed the soil, retain moisture, protect roots, and slow weed growth.
- Remove all dead, broken, diseased or problem limbs by cutting them back to the nearest substantial branch or shoot. Prune any time but late summer, when warm days may encourage new growth that can't survive winter.