

Springtime Tips for Gardening

What is the Right Garden Style for You?

The amount of space you have available to you will greatly influence your type and style of garden. If you live in a rural area and are lucky enough to have a large garden you will be able to divide up the space and create different areas for different types of garden. If on the other hand you live in a city centre and only have a small area, then your choices are greatly reduced.

Another point to consider is the amount of free time you have available to maintain your garden. If you have a demanding job or a large family to take care off you may find that trying to cope with a large intricate garden to much to cope with. Large flower gardens for instance can be very time consuming to maintain and to keep them looking their best, as many flowering plants need continual dead-heading to prolong their flowering period.

Your fitness level may also influence the type and style of your garden. If you have heart problems or breathing difficulties for instance, you probably wouldn't want to be digging over a large vegetable plot each year. If you are confined to a wheel chair or suffer with back problems then you may need to consider having raised beds that you can reach easily.

One other factor you may want to consider is the actual purpose of the garden?

- Do you want to attract wildlife?
- Create a space for entertaining friends and family?
- Have a safe area for your children to play?
- A peaceful place to relax?
- Create a productive garden to feed the family?

When thinking about the style of your garden style remember that it is possible to incorporate different garden types into one garden. Many vegetables have attractive foliage and can be grown in amongst your ornamental plants. In fact organic gardeners will often plant certain ornamentals in their vegetable plots in order to attract pests away from their vegetable crops.

Here are some common garden styles:

- Organic Garden
- Raised Garden
- Container Garden

By considering these points and deciding what you want to use the garden for you will hopefully avoid starting something that you will later regret.

The Organic Garden

“Organic gardening is not just the avoidance of chemicals, in the larger view, it is organic living using nature’s laws.” I read this quote by an unknown person sometime ago and realized that

my parents and others like them were organic gardeners long before the current resurrection of these principles. They didn't use chemicals on the food they would feed to their children and gardening was a part of daily living to ensure there was sufficient food to preserve for the long winters. Everything was re-cycled and kitchen scraps were routinely thrown onto the garden to replenish the earth. Organic fertilizers such as manure were used and the only fertilizer on the roses was bone meal. My mother and father produced the best tasting vegetables and lots of them – enough to feed a family of seven throughout the winter. Birds, worms, and other signs of a living earth were welcomed into the garden.

In recent times synthetic chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides have become the practice most common among commercial agricultural practices. These practices have had some undesirable results such as the loss or depletion of topsoil, land becomes less fertile, and the excessive use of pesticides has resulted in pests resistant to the current chemicals resulting in the development of even stronger chemicals. Our environment is being damaged by toxic chemical spills, chemicals leaching into rivers and water supplies are contaminating our drinking water, and the effect of global warming is becoming a major part of the political agenda.

Our personal diet and health is a major topic of importance as more attention is being paid to the relationship between food and health. Research has demonstrated that organically grown vegetables are higher in vitamins and minerals than those grown with inorganic fertilizers. Gardening organically and growing as much of our own food as possible is one of the steps we can take to start healing the earth on which we live and in the process healing ourselves. Several key components are fundamental to the practice of organic gardening.

The Organic Garden – 10 Practical Steps to Success

1. **Soil.** The soil is kept healthy by working with Nature rather than against it. Practices include using organic fertilizers such as manure to replenish the earth and all refuse produced by the garden should be recycled back into the garden. Organic gardening uses all of the waste produced in the garden such as grass clippings, leaves, and leftovers from the kitchen to make compost that feeds the soil and keeps it full of the nutrients necessary to grow crops.
2. **Avoid the use of all synthetic chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides.** Eliminating the use of chemicals in the garden allows gardeners to not worry about children, pets, and wildlife coming in contact with synthetic weed killers and fertilizers on the lawn and shrubs. The food grown is pesticide-free, additive-free, and nutritious food for the table.
3. **Sustainability.** In his book, *Gardening Organically*, John Fedor defines sustainability as “the ability of a society or an ecosystem to function indefinitely without squandering the resources on which it relies.” Organic gardening does this by ensuring there is no loss of nutrients or topsoil in the garden.

4. **Environmental Stewardship.** Gardening organically means that the environment benefits from the reduction in contamination of the water supply and air pollution. It means that we provide a habitat for wildlife including beneficial insects and animals.
5. **Wildlife-friendly Habitats.** Informal areas can be created to assist wildlife in their search for habitat where they can survive the destruction of many areas; destructions that have now endangered many species.
6. **Intensive planting.** Plants are spaced closely together to conserve water and shield the soil from sunlight thus helping to prevent weed seeds from germinating and growing.
7. **Biodiversity.** Biodiversity ensures that when a change in growing conditions occurs, a single crop from a monoculture does not lead to a crop failure. The food supply does not become jeopardized when a diversity of species are planted.
8. **Rotating Crops.** Crop rotation assists in the control against soil-borne pests and diseases. This rotation makes a difference in the productivity of the garden as those diseases that affect the plants are kept in check by the rotation of the crops to other areas of the garden.
9. **Watering and Weeding.** Rainwater can be saved to water the garden. Soaker hoses, drip irrigation, and watering by hand conserve water. Mulches are invaluable in both water conservation and slowing down weed germination.
10. **Saving Seeds.** Save some seeds from your best plants when harvesting crops. Many old varieties are being lost at an alarming rate and preserving this biodiversity is important. Some of these saved seeds have been used to develop new strains after disaster has affected commonly cultivated varieties.

Raised Bed Gardening: What Are The Benefits?

Where soil is of poor quality and drainage inadequate, raised bed gardening makes it simple to create patches of fertile, well-drained soil. This can, in turn save money as well as time to!

It is considerably cheaper and less effort than installing a drainage system and then trucking in topsoil.

Combined with good drainage control, you can grow all sorts of fussy plants.

Raised bed gardening elevates plants to a more workable level, making them easier to tend to. Raised bed gardening is also great for vegetable or cutting gardens.

For gardeners in wheelchairs or with back pain, raised bed gardening is a godsend. Just make sure the area between the beds is wide and firm enough for ease of movement.

Raised bed gardening is extremely low maintenance too. Plants can be kept organized, and all the soil and debris can be kept within its borders. This means a serious reduction in your hard work!

There are many reasons for the Raised beds revival. But probably the most important is more production per square foot of garden. Raised beds don't require the usual space between rows because you don't walk in the bed to cultivate or harvest.

Greater production can be achieved with raised bed gardening because of the lack of soil compaction. In a normal garden you have to leave space between the plants in order to work them properly. This then leads to soil compaction which can reduce crop yields up to 50 percent. All a plants needs i.e water and air have trouble moving through compacted soil.

When compaction isn't the only problem, then raised bed gardening can help there to. Homeowners may have areas unsuited for conventional gardens. Raised bed gardening will physically rise above these, with frames as its foundation. It allows you to recycle problem spots!

Raised beds are also a boom with pest control to. If you get an invasion of furry little criters, simply line the bed with poultry wire or some hardware cloth. You can discourage rabbits by placing their favorite foods in a framed bed with a low fence.

Container Gardening Tips For New Gardeners

Container gardening is a fun and rewarding hobby that is enjoyed by millions of people all over the world. Not only is it relaxing and enjoyable, but you get the satisfaction of knowing that you're growing your own plants and you know where they came from! With more and more stories on the news about various outbreaks of food poisoning from things like lettuce and green onions, many people are finding it important to start growing as much of their own produce as possible.

Many people are afraid to deal with container gardening. They think it is too difficult or too expensive. On the contrary, it is actually very easy and can be quite inexpensive! Here we explore the ease of setting up your first container garden, as well as the expenses involved.

We're going to walk you through the process of setting up your first container garden. In this example, we will be growing some basil.

Step One: Purchase your container gardening supplies. You will need the following items for this example.

Three plastic pots with drainage holes in the bottom, preferably with trays underneath to catch soil and water drainage, about 5-6 inches in diameter, and 5-6 inches deep,

- one packet of basil seeds,
- one small bag of organic compost,
- one small bag of peat moss,
- one small garden trowel,
- one small watering can or clean spray bottle,
- and one very sunny windowsill (or a florescent or halogen grow light if no sunny window is available.)

The total cost for these materials will be somewhere around \$20 or less if you have a sunny windowsill. If you need a grow light, that will cost an additional \$15-\$20.

Step Two: Prepare the soil. Mix together 1 part peat moss with 5 parts compost. (For every one trowel full of peat moss, put in 5 trowels full of compost.) Fill the three pots up to about ½ inch from the top with this mixture.

Step Three: Plant the seeds. Simply make a hole about 1 inch deep in the center of each pot with your finger. Put about three seeds into each hole. Then cover the seeds with soil. Water lightly and place in the windowsill or under a grow light. Once the seeds sprout and reach about 2 inches in height, remove any extra sprouts so that you only have one plant in each pot.

Step Four: In order to care for your plants, all you need to do is water them regularly and keep them maintained. Check the soil daily for moisture. Whenever the soil feels dry, water it lightly. To maintain the bushy growth, pinch off the tops of each stem every couple of weeks and remove any flower stalks as soon as you see them growing.

That's it! It's really that simple to start a container garden. In this example, we planted basil, but you can apply this method to practically any herb, small vegetable, or flower, with only minor modifications.

Spring Planting Tips

Spring means that the garden centers are packed with people, and car trunks are packed with plants. Everybody has dirt on their knees, dirt under their nails, and is excited about gardening. To make certain that this excitement yields positive results, let's discuss the basics in this article of spring planting tips.

Installing new plants and having them grow successfully is not difficult, nor is it as complicated as some would have you think. Is it as easy as just digging a hole and setting the plant in? Yes, it certainly can be.

Let's start with B&B plants. B&B is short for balled in burlap. Closely examine the ball on the plant that you have purchased. Did the diggers wrap twine around the ball to hold the plant secure? If they did, you should at least cut the twine and lay it in the bottom of the hole, or

remove it completely. Pay close attention around the stem of the plant where it emerges from the root ball, as diggers often wrap the twine around the stem several times as they tie the ball. This is extremely important because if the string is nylon, it will not rot and will girdle and kill the plant two or three years from now.

When B&B plants are stored in the nursery for extended periods of time it becomes necessary to re-burlap them if the bottom starts to rot before the plants are sold. If the plant that you buy has been re-burlaped it is possible that there could be nylon stings between the two layers of burlap, so check the stem carefully. As long as the nylon string is removed from around the stem of the plant, it is actually harmless around the rest of the ball, and you do not have to remove it.

Is the root ball wrapped in genuine burlap, or imitation burlap made of a non-biodegradable plastic material?

Genuine burlap will rot quickly underground and does not have to be disturbed before planting. If you're not sure or suspect a poly type burlap, you don't have to remove it completely, but should loosen it around the stem of the plant and cut some vertical slices around the circumference of the ball.

Now here's the critical part. What kind of soil are you planting in?

If your soil is heavy clay, I highly suggest that you raise the planting bed at least 8" with good rich topsoil. If you can't do that for some reason, install the plant so that at least 2" or more of the root ball is above the existing grade and mound the soil over the root ball. Keep in mind that plants installed this way could dry out over the summer, but planting them flush with the ground in heavy clay can mean that the roots will be too wet at other times of the year.

The "experts" suggest that when planting in clay soil you dig the hole wider and deeper than the root ball and fill around and under the plant with loose organic material. That sounds like a really great idea, doesn't it? Some of these experts also recommend that you dig the hole extra deep and put a few inches of gravel in the bottom for drainage. Where do you suppose they think this water is going to "drain" to?

Keep in mind that most B&B plants are grown in well drained soil. That means that the soil in the root ball is porous and water can easily pass through. Now imagine if you will, a root ball about 15" in diameter, setting in a hole 30" in diameter. All around and under that root ball is loose organic matter. Inside of that root ball is porous soil. Now along comes Mother Nature with a torrential downpour. There is water everywhere, and it is not going to soak into that hard packed clay soil, so it is just flowing across the top of the ground searching for the lowest point.

When it reaches our newly planted tree surrounded by loose organic matter, it is going to seep in until the planting hole is completely full of water. (Remember my article on getting rid of

standing water and the French drain system?) By using this planting technique we have actually created a French drain around our poor little plant that cannot tolerate its roots being without oxygen for long periods of time. Because the bottom of this hole is clay, even though we've added gravel for drainage, there is nowhere for the water to go, and this plant is going to suffer and likely die.

If you cannot raise the planting bed with topsoil, and are planting in clay soil, I recommend that you install the root ball at least 2" above grade and backfill around the ball with the soil that you removed when you dug the hole. Backfilling with the clay soil that you removed is actually like building a dam to keep excess water from permeating the root ball of your newly planted tree. The plant is not going to thrive in this poor soil, but at least it will have a chance to survive.

Once again, raising the bed with good rich topsoil is the best thing you can do to keep your plants healthy and happy.

No matter what kind of soil you have, be careful not to install your plants too deep. They should never be planted any deeper than they were grown in the nursery. Planting too deep is a common problem, and thousands of plants are killed each year by gardeners who just don't understand how critical planting depth is.

Staking newly planted trees is always a good idea. If your new tree constantly rocks back and forth when the wind blows it will have a very difficult time establishing new roots into the existing soil. Stabilize the tree with a stake. You can use a wooden stake, a fence post, or for small trees I often use 1/2" electro magnetic tubing, (conduit), available at any hardware store.

You can secure the tree to the stake with a single wrap of duct tape. In about six months or a year the sun will dry the glue on the duct tape and it will fall off. Check the tape to make sure that it has fallen off. You don't want to girdle the tree with the tape.

Container grown plants are much easier. Follow the rules for depth of planting as described earlier. Before gently removing the plant from the container check the drain holes in the bottom of the container for roots that might be growing out the holes. If so, cut them off so they will not make it difficult to get the plant out of the container.

The easiest way to remove the plant from the container is to place your hand over the top of the container and turn it completely upside down and give it a gentle shake. The plant should slide right into your hand.

Examine the root mass as you hold it in your hand. Sometimes when plants have been growing in a container for a long time the roots start to grow in a circular pattern around the root mass. This is not good, and you should disturb these roots before planting so you can break this circular pattern. You can take a knife and actually make about three vertical slices from the top of the root mass to the bottom. This will stimulate new roots that will grow outward into the soil of your garden. Or, you can just take your fingers and loosen the roots that are circling the root mass and force them outward before you plant them.

What about fertilizer, bone meal, peat moss, and all those other additives they are going to try and sell you at the garden center?

Raise your planting beds with good rich topsoil and forget about the additives. Be very careful with fertilizers, they may do more harm than good. I landscaped my house 14 years ago and I haven't got around to fertilizing the plants yet, and have no intention of doing so. They look great.

As far as bone meal and all those other soil additives are concerned, don't get too caught up in all that stuff. The only thing that I know for sure is that they will make your wallet thinner, but I don't think you'll see a difference in your plants. Over the years I've landscaped several hundred homes with fantastic results, and I never added any of these additives to my planting beds.

Did I mention planting in good rich topsoil? That's the secret!

Enjoy your Spring and Your Garden!