



Starting a Flower Garden

When you start a flower garden, it's easy to imagine what you would like the finished garden to look like. With some planning and elbow grease, your garden will bring much enjoyment, increase property values, and give you less grass to mow!

Before you begin

Plan your design on paper. List the types and colors of plants and the shape and features of the hardscape, or the physical structure of the garden. It will help to sketch the general shape of the garden, the permanent features, and the placement of plants by types or colors. This will help at planting time. Will there be any trees, fencing, walls, edging, water features, an irrigation system, or obstacles like HVAC units, water meters, utility lines buried underground, permanent structures, drainage spouts or ditches, etc. The more planning that is done in the early stages and preparation of the hardscape and surrounding landscape, the greater the impact on the finished project. Adding the plants is the fun and easy part, but know that it comes toward the end of the project. Be sure to give yourself enough time to complete the project. Some projects can be completed in a weekend, whereas others will take several days, and require heavy equipment. It would be wise to contact your local utilities to ask them to mark your property and indicate where electrical, phone, water, or cable television lines are buried. Not only do you not want to cut these lines, but it may take them a few days to mark them for you.

Prepare the Hardscape

First outline the area to be planted. Use rope or string to outline, then stand back and make sure the shape is what you expected it to look like. Imagine mature plants in the garden and your other features, and determine if what you've done is your best option. Change the shape as many times as you like until it is ideal. If you prefer a perfect circle, square or rectangle, get out the measuring tape and mark your center or corners and connect the dots. For a circle, tie string to a long nail, then force the nail into the center

of your circle. Hold the spray-paint at the end of the string, then keeping the string tight, spray the paint and walk in a circle until the circle is complete, then pull the nail out.

When you have marked the area to be planted, grass and other debris must be removed. Using a shovel, remove four to five inches of the sod. Relocate the pieces to fill gaps in the lawn or other parts of the yard. Now, soil can be removed for preparation (mixing with soil conditioner, compost, etc.), and construction of any hardscape features can begin. At this point, structural edging and water features should be put in place. Some gardeners use brick as an edging and embed what is known as a “mow curb”, also made of brick, around the perimeter of the planting area. This should be planned for when laying out the string. The mow curb allows a lawn mower to cut the grass up to the edge of the mow curb and reduces the need to use a trimmer after mowing. Installation is similar to that of a brick patio or walkway, including the use of a tamper and sand to level the ground, and weed-blocking landscape fabric to keep pesky weeds from coming up between the bricks. Installation of water features should be done per the manufacturer’s instructions, or by a professional. After all permanent structures are in place; the soil can be prepared and placed in the planting area.

Soil preparation

This is essential to the survival of your plantings. Based on the types of flowers you have selected, the soil should have a loose loam to facilitate root growth and allow for drainage as well. If you are planning to use the soil that has been removed from the planting site, use a wheelbarrow to mix small, manageable batches. Break down any clumps of dirt that are bigger than a golf ball. **Add *Nature’s GREEN-RELEAF Compost-Soil Conditioner*** and maybe some sand to keep the soil loose. Depending on the size of your garden, it may be more cost effective to order a load of ***Nature’s GREEN-RELEAF Engineered Topsoil*** by the cubic yard and have it delivered to your garden instead of buying lots of bags and carrying it yourself. This is also a useful product for raised bed gardening

The key to plant selection is simple

Select plants that will look nice together, and fit in to your maintenance schedule and budget. Your local garden center or any number of gardening websites will guide you in

plant selection. Keep in mind the mature size of the plants you are selecting. You wouldn't want to put tall plants in front of short ones or all small plants alone in a large garden. There are many choices for many different combinations of light, space, length of bloom or color, etc. There are many varieties that create instant beauty as well as attract wildlife. Many gardeners plant gardens for birds and butterflies to enjoy their natural beauty. If you have a suburban or rural garden, deer may be an attractive nuisance. Just a few deer can consume an entire garden overnight, leaving behind empty stalks of flowers with no blooms, or those almost ripe tomatoes on the vine you were planning to eat will be but a memory without some careful planning. Many plants are known for being deer-resistant, and products are available for discouraging animal thievery.

Bulbs and perennials will come back at roughly the same time each year, and are a great investment for gardeners on a budget. Their blooming season is generally shorter, so some gardeners prefer to plant annuals because they will mature for the longest time and have a more colorful "show". Also keep in mind that there are early, mid-season, and late-season bloomers. Ideally, a garden could have sections of plants that will bloom sequentially, offering a sort of slow-motion firework show with their featured blooms, and there will always be something new to see and enjoy.

Plants can be started from seeds, grown from cuttings, or come as "bare root stock" from a catalog supplier. The price of the plant generally depends on how mature it is. Seeds are generally inexpensive, but you may not get all of them to grow, and they take longer to mature. Bare root stock already has a healthy set of roots that will thrive if planted in a timely manner (as soon as they arrive to the garden location, whether purchased or shipped) and planted in well prepared soil. Many green-thumbers are able to get cuttings (cut cleanly and placed in water) to grow roots which will develop into healthy plants that resemble the parent plant. Rooting hormone is a powder that can be purchased to encourage root development. If you are a beginner gardener, young plants that are already started will be easier to use in your garden.

Putting it all together is the fun part!

In your prepared garden space, add your prepared soil so that it creates a slightly mounded appearance. This is so that when it settles in, your garden won't look like a shallow hole or a catch basin every time it rains. Spread it evenly, and cover it with

weed-blocking landscape fabric, using pins to secure the edges. The weed-block is optional, but will be a real time-saver later on. Overlap the fabric if necessary to cover the whole garden, and then place your plants/seeds/bulbs in the areas they are intended to be. Slice an "X" in the fabric where the plant is to be planted. Bulbs have a sprout side, which is pointy, and a root side; plant the sprout side up and the root side down. Bare root stock should be buried deeply enough and spread the roots out so they will have better opportunity to more quickly take hold of the soil. To plant seeds, the required depth is indicated on their package, as is the distance apart. Plants that are placed too close together may not get enough nutrients and will compete for water and both plants will suffer. Group similar plants together, pair by color or type, and work steadily to get your live plants in the ground as soon as possible. If the roots are allowed to dry out, the plant may not survive.

Once the plants/seeds/bulbs are in the ground, carefully cover the garden with a generous three to four inch layer of mulch. Cover the landscape fabric or soil all the way up to the edges of the garden, and surround each plant. Using a gentle spray or low pressure water nozzle, water your garden thoroughly. The mulch will help retain heat and moisture in the soil, protect the plants from illness, and put the finishing touches on your garden.

Maintenance

Good maintenance will keep your garden looking beautiful season after season. If you did not use weed-block, be sure to pull weeds or grasses out regularly. They detract from your garden's beauty, and rob your plants of water and nutrients. If you chose perennials or bulbs, after they have finished blooming and some of the greenery has died away, cut them back with sharp shears. For the remainder of the season, the plant will develop more root growth and prepare for winter and next year. Perennials will also have a slow first season. In the second season, the plants and blooms will develop more fully. The third and subsequent years for perennials are the best because they have developed fully and can even be dug up and divided to make more plants to grow in other gardens.

Watering

Watering your garden is crucial for the survival and appearance of your garden. Irrigation systems and timers can make watering easy and cost effective. Drip irrigation

systems provide water directly to just the plant, and prevent wasting water by over watering un-planted areas.

Once you have successfully planted your first garden, you may be inspired to add other gardens to your property or try herbs or vegetables. Container gardens can add beauty to small spaces, and fruit trees can be grown and pruned to manageable sizes with generous yields. Seeds and cuttings can be exchanged with other gardeners for a low cost way to add variety to your landscape. So, get out there and garden!

List of Materials & Equipment

1. Garden hoe
2. Wheel barrow
3. Drainage rock
4. Small hand trowel
5. *Nature's GREEN-RELEAF Compost-Soil Conditioner*
6. Plants
7. Water

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