



Start a Garden

Garden Guide Basics

Only a few basic steps are required to start a garden: selecting appropriate plants for your area, watering and fertilizing. However, if you choose to become more involved, below are some suggested tips:

- Test the soil to determine its pH level and nutritional status, or ask a local gardener about conditions in the area. Add lime (i.e., calcium-based alkaline product) to neutralize acid soil and sulfur to neutralize alkaline soil.
- Check with a local garden center to select plants that grow best in the area and will have the least pest problems. It is also important to determine how much sunlight your garden receives, as most flowering plants and vegetables require at least six hours of sun each day.
- To improve drainage, condition soil that contains too much sand or clay by applying soil conditioner, leaf mold, compost or other soil amendments. Spread it from 2 to 4 inches deep over the soil beds.
- Dig the planting site to a depth of at least 8 inches for most bedding plants or to the depth of the rootball for trees and shrubs, stirring in the soil amendments. Remove large stones and extraneous roots. Break up lumps of soil with the edge of a spade.
- Water plants thoroughly and apply a fertilizer suitable for the types of plants you will be using.
- Rake the site level. Use the front and back of the rake to make a fine, crumbly surface.
- Plant seeds or transfer ready-grown plants from containers; prevent transplant shock for your plants by using a solution such as Miracle-Gro® Liquid Quick Start® Plant Food.

Flower Garden Tips

- Plant more seeds than you need and then thin (cut with a fine-tipped set of shears) the weakest plants in the bunch. This allows room for the strongest ones to develop to maturity. For transplants, most flowering annuals need to be spaced 6 to 12 inches apart (the closer together they are, the more quickly they will fill in); perennials may need more room.
- Weed regularly and place mulch around plants to help control the weeds. Organic mulch, such as shredded bark, is the most attractive type for flower gardens.
- Watch for insects, pests and diseases; if problems occur, you may want to consider checking with experienced gardeners to learn which controls are most effective. Flower gardens are usually less vulnerable, but slugs, snails, rodents or deer may require extra effort to control.
- Deadhead faded flowers from long-blooming plants to prevent seed formation, which can steal energy.



Vegetable Garden Tips

- Work organic matter into the soil in early spring before planting vegetables.
- Situate the garden within convenient reach of the kitchen. A sunny location protected from north winds is best. A nearby source of water is essential.
- Select vegetables that are appropriate for the growing season in your area. Interplant quick crops (leaf lettuce) with slower-maturing crops (cabbage) since dense planting thwarts weeds. As soon as one crop is finished, plant another.
- For seeds, follow directions on the packet. For transplants, use scissors to cut off unwanted seedlings at ground level instead of pulling up roots, which can disturb neighboring plants.
- Weed regularly and place mulch around plants to help control the weeds. Weed-free (or first-cut) straw and compost are often used for vegetable gardens. Consider using plastic mulches (sheets of plastic covering) to enhance vegetable growth and development, and to help sustain heat.
- If you're having problems growing vegetables in the ground, you could try building raised frames with weather-resistant lumber, concrete blocks or stacked stone. Leave space between beds wide enough to accommodate a wheelbarrow or a mower. Fill beds with soil; top-dress with compost in fall or winter.
- Watch for insects, pests and diseases; vegetable gardens tend to be the most vulnerable to pests.

Plant Health Warning Signs

- Curling leaves are usually the first indication of stress. The surface area of the plant is being reduced to cut down on transpiration (loss of water from the leaves).
- Normally shiny leaves grow dull. Bright green leaves take on a blue or gray-green appearance.
- New growth wilts or droops and older leaves turn brown, dry up and fall off.
- Flowers fade quickly and drop prematurely.

Find out more about plant health warning signs and solutions at <http://problemsolving.scotts.com>.

