

The Joy of Gardening



Published by:

Charles H. Smith

P.O. Box 2225

West Columbia, SC 29171

Charleshsmith.com

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If you're thinking about starting a garden, the first thing you need to consider is what type of garden you will have. There are many different choices and often it can be hard to pick just one, but hopefully you can narrow it down. But by narrowing it down, you'll make the gardening experience easier on yourself and the plants. If all your plants are similar, then it shouldn't be very hard to care for them all. So here are some of the main garden ideas for you to choose from.

If you're just looking for something to look nice in your yard, you'll want a flower garden. These are usually filled with perennial flower. Perennial flowers are flowers which stay healthy year-round. They're basically weeds because of their hardiness, only nice looking. Different areas and climates have different flowers which are considered perennials. If you do a quick internet search for your area, you can probably find a list of flowers that will bring your flower garden to life. These usually only require work in the planting stage - after that, the flower take care of themselves. The only downside to this is that you don't have any product to show for it.

Another choice for your garden is to have a vegetable garden. These usually require a little more work and research than a flower garden, but can be much more rewarding. No matter what time of the year it is, you can usually find one vegetable that is still prospering. That way you can have your garden be giving you produce almost every day of the year! When starting a vegetable

garden, you should build it with the thought in mind that you will be adding more types of veggies in later. This will help your expandability. Once all your current crops are out of season, you won't be stuck with almost nowhere to put the new crops. A vegetable garden is ideal for someone who wants some produce, but doesn't want to devote every waking hour to perfecting their garden (see below.)

One of the more difficult types of gardens to manage is a fruit garden. It's definitely the most high-maintenance. When growing fruits, many more pests are attracted due to the sweetness. You not only have to deal with having just the right dirt and fertilizer, you

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have to deal with choosing a pesticide that won't kill whoever eats the fruits. Your fruit garden will probably not produce year-round. The soil needs to be just right for the plants to grow, and putting in another crop during its off-season could be disastrous to its growth process. If you're willing to put lots of work into maintaining a garden, then a fruit garden could be a good choice for you.

So now that I've outlined some of the main garden types that people choose, I hope you can make a good decision. Basically, the garden type comes down to

what kind of product you want, and how much work you want to put into it. If you're looking for no product with no work, go with a flower garden. If you want lots of delicious product, but you are willing to spend hours in your garden each day, then go for a fruit garden. Just make sure you don't get into something you can't handle!

Choosing and Planting Perennials

If you've been growing a vegetable garden for a while, you might be feeling slightly disgruntled at how plain it is to look at. I too began my gardening career with a vegetable garden, but I decided that it wasn't quite as pleasing to look at as I would have liked. I heard from a friend that the use of perennial flowers could be a great way to liven up my garden without adding any extra work for me.

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Perennial flowers are strong, local flowers that come back every year without having to replant or do any extra work. During their off seasons, the flowers and stems die back and you can hardly even tell the plant is there (rather than just dying and looking like hideous brown clumps in your garden). When it's time to bloom, entirely new flowers shoot up where the old ones were.

Before deciding whether to put in perennials or not, you need to make sure that your soil has proper drainage. If the water stays saturated for long periods of time, you should build a raised bed. To test, dig a hole and fill it with water. Wait a day, and then fill it with water again. All traces of water should be

gone within 10 hours. If the hole isn't completely dry, you will need to build a raised bed.

Picking your perennials can be a complicated process. The goal should be to have them flowering as much as possible during the

year, so you should create an outline of the year. Research the different types of flower you want, and create a timeline of flowering. If you plan it right, you can have a different type of flower blooming at any point in the year. Getting just the right mixture of seeds can give your yard a constantly changing array of colors.

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When you go to buy the seeds from your local florist or nursery, you might be able to find a custom seed mixture for your area. This takes the really tough research part out of the job. Usually these blends are optimized for the local climate, and do great jobs of having flowers always grow in your yard. If one of these isn't available, you can ask the employees what they think would be a good

mixture. They should be happy to help you put something together which will be optimal for whatever you desire.

You should definitely use mulch when planting perennials. This will reduce the overall amount of work you have to do, by reducing the amount of weeds and increasing the water retention. Bark or pine needles work great, I have found, and depending on the rest of your yard you might have them on hand at no charge. As for fertilizer, you should use it sparingly once your plants start to come to life.

When you actually go to plant the seeds, you should put them in small, separate clumps according to the directions. This is because they tend to spread out, and if you have too many too close together then they will end up doing nothing but choking each other out. As you plant them, throw in a little bit of extremely weak fertilizer. In no time at all you should start to see flowers blooming up.

Creating a Raised Bed

If your current planting goals involve plants that require good water drainage, I am sure you know how frustrating it is to have a yard that just won't cooperate. Some plants can handle the excess water that comes about from being in an area that doesn't drain properly. In fact, it might just cause them to bloom more lushly. However, other plants don't cope as well, and it will cause them to die a gruesome, bloated death. You should always find out about the drainage required for every plant you buy, and make sure that it won't conflict with any of the areas you are considering planting it in.

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In order to test how much water your designated patch of soil will retain, dig a hole approximately ten inches deep. Fill it with water, and come back in a day when all the water had disappeared. Fill it back up again. If the 2nd hole full of water isn't gone in 10 hours, your soil has a low saturation point. This means that when water soaks into it, it

will stick around for a long time before dissipating. This is unacceptable for almost any plant, and you are going to have to do something to remedy it if you want your plants to survive.

The usual method for improving drainage in your garden is to create a raised bed. This involves creating a border for a small bed, and adding enough soil and compost to it to raise it above the rest of the yard by at least 5 inches. You'll be amazed at how much your water drainage will be improved by this small modification. If you're planning to build a raised bed, your prospective area is either on grass or on dirt. For each of these situations, you should build it slightly differently.

If you want to start a raised garden in a non grassy area, you won't have much trouble. Just find some sort of border to retain the dirt you will be adding. I've found that there is nothing that works quite as well as a few two by fours. After you've created the wall, you must put in the proper amount soil and steer manure. Depending on how long you plan to wait before planting, you will want to adjust the ratio to allow for any deteriorating that may occur.

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If you're trying to install a raised bed where sod already exists, you will have a slightly more difficult time. You will need to cut the sod around the perimeter of the garden, and flip it over. This may sound simple, but you will need something with a very sharp edge to slice the edges of the sod and get under it. Once you have turned it all upside down, it is best to add a layer of straw to discourage the grass from growing back up. After the layer of straw, simply add all the soil and steer manure that a normal garden would need.

Planting your plants in your new area shouldn't pose

much difficulty. It is essentially the same process as your usual planting session. Just be sure that the roots don't extent too far into the original ground level. The whole point of creating the raised bed is to keep the roots out of the soil which saturates easily. Having long roots that extend that far completely destroys the point.

Once you have plants in your new bed, you'll notice an almost immediate improvement. The added soil facilitates better root development. At the same time, evaporation is prevented and decomposition is discouraged. All of these things added together

makes for an ideal environment for almost any plant to grow in. So don't be intimidated by the thought of adjusting the very topography of your yard. It is a simple process as I'm sure you've realized, and the long term results are worth every bit of work.

Creating Microclimates to Facilitate Growth

Many gardeners live in areas where almost anything can grow effortlessly. Just plant the seeds and water it for a few weeks, and you've got a beautifully lush plant. But if you live in somewhere like

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Colorado, you'll understand what its like to have a slim selection of plants that naturally grow. It can be quite a challenge to facilitate the growth of a large variety of plants, especially when the very world you live in seems to be rooting against you. Some people solve this problem by loading up their plants with every type of chemical and fertilizer known to man. This usually works, but to me it seems kind of unnatural to rely on man made materials to keep your plants alive. Also, if I'm growing fruits or vegetables, I don't feel very comfortable eating something that is entirely

composed of chemicals.

A gardening theory that I have relied on in the past to grow many types of plants is that of creating a "microclimate" for each type of plant. This is when you regulate the sunlight, shade, moisture, and wind factors for each separate plant. It sounds like a challenge, and it is. But you can regulate these factors in such a way that the

plant feels just like it is in the ideal growing conditions. This can be achieved by the use of wind barriers, shading umbrellas, extra water, or different types or amounts of compost.

If you're ready to make an attempt at creating microclimates, you'll need to make a detailed plan in advanced. You should start by finding a large shade providing bush or tree that will grow fast and naturally in your area. Just look at some undeveloped plots of land and see what is there. Most likely it grew on its own without any planting or care. This is what you want to happen. Usually the growing of one plant can bring about the growing of another more desirable plant.

If you have a fence in your backyard (you would be surprised at how many people don't) then you already have a good amount of shade to work with. You can start the microclimate process using just the shade of the fence, combined with (perhaps) a screen or large bush to shade your new plant for the other half of the day that the fence doesn't take care of. The fence is also useful for shading against wind for very fragile plants.

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Once you have established the shade, be it natural or unnatural, you have created a slightly less harsh miniature environment. You must remember this is a gradual process, and find a new plant to put in the shade of the other one. Now your choices are a little more open. You don't have to go with a rugged plant like the one you did before; you can now choose a plant that survives in cooler weather.

If the plant you are trying to grow next requires more moisture in the air than your area provides, installing a fountain or small pond can fix this problem due to the

evaporation. You may think you don't want to waste water on a pond or fountain, but it's all going toward the betterment of your garden. It's just like the watering process, only indirect. As an added benefit, usually fountains are quite aesthetically attractive and a great addition to your garden.

I can't explain every stage of the process, because everyone's goals and setups are slightly different. But to reach your goal, you should do research on every plant that you would like to have in your garden. Find out everything you can about the zone that it flourishes in, and ask yourself how you can emulate that zone within your own backyard. Almost always you can take control of the environment and recreate whatever you wish. Usually all it takes is some planning and strategy.

Dealing with Garden Pests

While tending to my own garden, I have found that one of the most frustrating things that can happen to a gardener is to walk outside to check on your plants. It's just a routine walk to make sure that your garden is thriving, but you end up finding holes in all of your

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plants that looked fine only hours before. The explanations for some of these plant-destroying holes are garden pests. Some of the main garden pests are slugs, worms, caterpillars, birds, snails, and the occasional gopher. Although you can never wipe out these pests entirely, after all your hard work in the garden you have to do something.

Insects are one of the worst things to have in your garden; they can live under the soil, in old weeds or piles of leaves, or in a number of other places. In order to help keep insects away, always try and eliminate places in your garden and near your garden that these

insects and other plant diseases could be living. Remove old leaves, weeds, or any other decaying matter that insects and diseases could be living in from your yard. Also, regularly turn over your garden soil and break apart any clumps of dirt so that you can eliminate the living spaces any insects that might be hiding underground.

Another way to rid your garden of the pests is to use dormant spray, which is used to keep destructive insects and diseases under control. It is best that you use dormant spray when your plants are dormant, usually around February or early March. I have used dormant spray many times on my garden and it has worked wonders on keeping insects out. But as I learned from experience, dormant spray is only effective if you follow the correct instructions. When I first decided to use some on my garden, I just dumped it everywhere in hopes of killing everything harmful. Unfortunately I ended up killing my entire garden along with my neighbors. Some insects can be beneficial to your garden though, so be sure to find out which insects help your garden.

Another pest problem I've had besides insects has been birds. Whenever I see birds in my garden I run outside a chase them away, but as soon as I step inside they come right back. The solution that I've come up with to keep the birds away from my garden is to put a bird feeder in my yard. Instead of costing me time and money by eating my garden, the birds eat at the bird feeder. In the long run it'll save you money. Not only can a bird feeder help keep birds away from your garden, but they can also be a new part of your yard decoration. Although not completely eliminating my bird problem, my bird feeder has made the problem smaller. Getting a dog has also helped.

If you start seeing mounds of dirt around your yard, and your plants keep unexplainably dieing, you can assume that you have a gopher problem. Thankfully, this is one of the few garden pests that I haven't had. However my friend has struggled with a tremendous gopher infestation, so I decided to research it. Gophers are rodents that are five to fourteen inches long. Their fur can be black, light brown, or white, and they have small tails. One method of getting rid of these root-eating pests is to set traps. The key to successfully capturing a gopher using a trap is to successfully locate the gopher's tunnels and set the trap correctly. Another way

to get rid of them is to use smoke bombs, which you place into the tunnel and the smoke spreads through out it and hopefully reaches the gopher.

If you suspect that your gardens are being pillaged by any of the pests I mentioned, I encourage you to try your hardest to eliminate the problem as soon as possible. The longer you let the species stay, the more established it will become.

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Sometimes, the urge to garden might be stomped out by other circumstances, such as living arrangements or space constrictions. If you live in an apartment, you can't really operate a full garden, just because you don't really have a yard! I think that one of the best solutions for this problem is to grow plants in containers. You can hang these, or just arrange them on your patio, window sill or balcony. Just a few baskets or pots, and your whole living area will look much classier and nicer.

A benefit of growing in small containers is the fact that you can move them

around to suit your needs. If you rearrange your furniture and you think that it would look nicer if it was in the other area, it's no trouble at all to scoot it over. As long as the lighting is about the same, your plant shouldn't mind the transition at all. Another benefit of the containers' versatility is the fact that you can adapt it to simulate any environment depending on the type of soil you fill it with and where you place it.

If you are trying to make an aesthetically pleasing arrangement of containers and plants, you can adjust the containers to be at different heights by hanging them from the ceiling or placing them on supports. Hanging them will allow you to make the most of the space you have. This is called “vertical gardening”. If you pull it off right, you can make a very pleasing arrangement of plants while conserving your valuable space. If you live in an apartment, you know how important it is to conserve space! One method of vertical gardening is the use of a wooden step ladder. If painted correctly, you can arrange all the plants on it in a beautiful, stylish cascade of color.

The maintenance of container plants takes slightly more time, since you have to water more often and go around to each individual container. However, the square footage for container plants is

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much less than that of an actual garden, so the time spent on maintenance and watering is more balanced. It is important that you don't over-water your container plants, as this can be just as fatal to their health as under-watering.

When choosing containers for your plants, you'll want to buy them all at once along with some extras in case

they break or you add more plants later. You don't want them to be all the same shape and size, but definitely the same style so that they compliment each other. Plastic containers are the best and require the least amount of watering, but if you want to stick with clay or earthen pots then you should line the inside with plastic. This helps it retain water more, as the clay will soak up water.

Another thing to remember when buying pots is the fact that the size of the pot will ultimately constrict the size of the plant. Make a

Careful choice of pots according to what you wish to grow in each one. If you search for the plant you chose on the internet, you should be able to find specifications as to how much root space it should be given. This can even be an advantage for you if you choose a plant that can grow very large. If you only have a limited amount of space for it, you can constrict it by choosing a pot that isn't large enough to support huge amounts of growth.

If the benefits of container gardening sound appealing to you, then you should start planning out your container garden today. If you write a list of all the plants you desire to have, you can do the necessary research to find out what size and shape of pots you should get. After that, it's just a matter of arranging them in a way that makes your home look the nicest.

Growing Your Own Herbs

If you're not the type of person that wants to spend their time managing an elaborate fruit or vegetable garden, you might consider planting and maintaining an herb garden. While the

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product might not seem as significant, you'll still enjoy the constant availability of fresh, delicious herbs to flavor your meals with.

First you'll want to choose the herbs that you'll plant. You might have a hard time doing this because of the huge scope of herbs available. But the best way to choose is to do what I did; just look at what you have in your kitchen. By planting

your own collection of these herbs, you can save money on buying them from the grocery store while having the added benefit of

freshness. Some of the herbs you might start with include rosemary, sage, basil, dill, mint, chives, and parsley among others.

When choosing an area to put your herb garden, you should remember that the soil should have extremely good drainage. If the dirt gets watered and stays completely saturated, you have no chance of ever growing a healthy plant. One of the best ways to fix the drainage problem is to dig a foot deep in the soil, and put a layer of crushed rocks down before replacing all the soil. This will allow all that water to escape, thus saving your plants.

When you are ready to begin planting herbs, you might be tempted to buy the more expensive plants from the store. However, with herbs it is much easier to grow them from seed than it is with other

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labored so hard over, it can be fatal to your plant to take off too much. If your plant isn't well established, it isn't healthy to take any leaves at all, even if it looks like its not using them. You should wait until your plant has been well established for at least several months before taking off any leaves. This wait will definitely be worth it, because by growing unabated your plant will produce healthily for years to come.

Once you've harvested your delicious home grown herbs, you'll want to use them in cooking. Why else would you have grown

plants. Therefore you can save a bundle of money by sticking with seed packets. Some herbs grow at a dangerously fast rate. For example, if you plant a mint plant in an open space then it will take over your entire garden in a matter of days. The best way to prevent this problem is to plant the more aggressive plants in pots (with holes in the bottom to allow drainage, of course).

When it comes time to harvest the herbs you have

them? Well first the process begins with drying them out. This is easily achieved by placing them on a cookie sheet and baking them 170 degrees Fahrenheit for 2 to 4 hours. After they're sufficiently dried to be used in cooking, you can consult the nearest cookbook for instructions on using them to effectively flavor a dish.

If you want to store your herbs for later usage, you should keep them in a plastic or glass container. Paper or cardboard will not work, because it will absorb the taste of the herbs. During the first few days of storage, you should regularly check the container and see if any moisture has accumulated. If it has, you must remove all the herbs and re-dry them. If moisture is left from the first drying process, it will encourage mildew while you store your herbs. Nobody likes mildew.

So if you enjoy herbs or gardening, or both, then you should probably consider setting up an herb garden. It might require a little bit of work at first to set it up for optimal drainage, and pick what herbs you want to grow. But after the initial hassle, it's just a matter of harvesting and drying all your favorite herbs.

Improving Your Garden by Adding a Fountain

A great way to spice up your garden is to add a water feature. These can be both soothing and aesthetically appealing. I've found that there's nothing more relaxing than sitting on a bench next to my garden and listening to my fountain while I read a good book or do some studying. Putting in a water feature is fairly easy and relatively inexpensive, and will add immensely to the pleasantness of your garden. Also, the maintenance level is minimal.

Usually, people install fountains for the benefit of the natural ambience it provides. For some reason, being around a gorgeous scene of water gives you a positive energy. This is also good if you practice Tai Chi or some form of yoga or meditation. The constant drone of the water is exactly what most people need to concentrate on what they are doing. Even if you're not into that kind of stuff, just being in a garden with a fountain has a sort of meditative quality to it, even if you're not trying to do so. I recommend it to anyone.

When you first decide to put in a fountain, you need to put great

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care into picking out one that will go well with the rest of your garden. If you have any other decorations, you want to consider if it goes well with your motif. Does the fountain you're considering stand out in your garden like a sore thumb, or does it look like it was meant to be there? If you're like me, you can't naturally tell whether the fountain will be a good addition to your garden just by looking at it. So my solution was to bring my sister (a natural at fashion design and that

kind of stuff) along with a picture of my garden to the store. I was able to get her expert opinion, as well as see for myself what it would look like. By doing this I was able to pick a beautiful rock fountain that goes marvelously with the rest of my garden.

However, I still had a slight problem with supplying my fountain with power. You see, my garden isn't very close to my house. I thought it would look pretty tacky to run an extension cord across my yard, so I had to come up with another solution. I discussed my situation with a Home Depot employee, and he quickly found me the exact solution I needed: an extension cord meant for being buried! All it took was a few hours of digging a small trench across my yard, and I had power to my fountain without an unsightly cord running across my yard. After I got over this little hitch, my fountain plan went beautifully.

So if you're looking for a way to make your garden a more classy and beautiful place to be, I hope you consider installing a fountain. The whole process is surprisingly inexpensive, and I think that you will be very happy with the results. Having a fountain in your garden is not only soothing, but it also adds a lot of character to an

otherwise bland garden. Remember, gardens are not just for giving us vegetables! A garden is a place to go when you want to retreat from the outside world and dwell in your own thoughts with no disturbance.

Installing a Drip Irrigation System

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If you're looking for ways to keep your garden watered without wasting too much time and money, you've probably gone through a lot of options in your mind. Maybe you've considered a sprinkler, a hose, or a good old-fashioned watering can. All of these methods might be convenient, but most of the time you will end up wasting water on plants that don't need any more. If you live in a drought stricken area like I do, you know that every bit of water counts. I ended up getting a drip irrigation system. I haven't regretted this decision at all.

When you install a drip irrigation system, you can choose one of two varieties: above ground and below ground. The above ground version drips small amounts of water continuously onto the ground, and allows it to soak in. It is all regulated from a pressure controller, which ensures that the water just comes out at a drip instead of a spray or a stream. These pressure

regulators are very inexpensive. The whole drip system can be set up with a pressure regulator and a garden hose with holes poked in it (although it is ideal for you to get a pipe designed for this type of use, I've found that the hose method works acceptably).

The underground system is a bit more of a pain to install and maintain. But if you're really into the aesthetic aspect of your garden and don't want any visible watering system, then you might consider it worth it. It's essentially the same as the above ground version, only a small trench is dug for the hose or pipe prior to any planting. This allows the water direct access to the roots for the most watering efficiency. Plus, you can impress your neighbors by having a beautiful garden without ever going outside to water it! They'll be baffled.

To choose between the two systems, you need to take several things into account. Do you have the same plant layout year round? If it is always changing, you probably won't want to bury your hose. It can

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be a pain to dig it up and re-align it with all your new plants every year or so. Even if your plant layout never changes, you need to consider how much you really mind seeing a hose in your garden. If it really bothers you to the extent that you're willing to work for a few hours to get rid of it, then by all means bury it. But otherwise I would suggest staying above ground if for nothing else than the convenience of repairing and rearranging.

One of the main advantages of the drip irrigation system is its efficiency. Instead of spraying large amounts of water willy-nilly like a hose does, it makes

the most of your precious water by putting it exactly where it is needed. It can also provide your garden with constant watering,

instead of just having to go thirsty whenever you're not around to water it.

So if you're looking for an easy, cheap, convenient, and efficient alternative watering method, you should go out to the gardening store today and purchase the necessary items to install a drip irrigation system. I think you'll be surprised at how much easier it is to maintain a garden after you have it.

Maintaining a Compost Heap

Many people who maintain gardens have a large amount of organic waste, from grass clippings to leaves and dead plants.

Unfortunately, many waste money and time having these wastes transported to a landfill. It isn't just a waste of good compost; it's a waste of everything that goes into the process of transporting it (the garbage man's time, the money you pay for the removal, etc). It is truly a travesty.

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All this garbage that people are trying to get rid of can be a better supplement for your garden than any fertilizer or chemical. If you properly facilitate the decomposition of all of the garbage, it will alter chemically until it is in such a state that it can be nothing but beneficial nutrition for other plants. Therefore you can turn all the stuff you would have thrown away into top grade fertilizer for your garden.

Usually compost is maintained in a pile somewhere in your backyard. Usually the thought of a

compost heap brings disturbing images to ones mind; heaps of rotten garbage emitting a horrid odor. However, if you maintain it

correctly you'll be able to produce great compost without producing an offensive odor. When I first began my compost pile in an effort to improve environmental health, I made several major errors. These included preventing the pile from the oxygen it truly needed, and keeping it too dry. It ended up decomposing in a very non-beneficial way, and producing an odor so foul that I had government agents knocking at my door.

When you are choosing your spot where you will be putting all of these materials, you should aim for a higher square footage. Having a really deep pile of compost is not a good idea, because generally the deeper sections won't be exposed to anything that is required for the process to work. It is better to spread it all out over a large area. If you have a shed or a tool shack of some sort, it is a possibility to spread it over the roof (with boards to keep it from falling off, of course). I have seen this done several times, and it helps keep the pile out of the way while still maintaining a large square footage.

A compost heap can consist of any organic garbage from your yard, garden or kitchen. This includes leaves, grass, any leftover food that won't be eaten, or newspaper (no more than a fifth of your pile should consist of newspaper, due to it having a harder time composting with the rest of the materials). Usually if you have a barrel devoted to storing all of these things, it will fill up within several weeks. It is quite easy to obtain compost, but the hard part truly comes in getting it to compost.

After you have begun to get a large assortment of materials in your compost heap, you should moisten the whole pile. This encourages the process of composting. Also chop every element of the pile into the smallest pieces possible. As the materials start to compress and meld together as they decompose, frequently head outside and aerate the pile. You can use a shovel to mix it all up, or an aeration tool to poke dozens of tiny holes into it. Doing this will increase the oxygen flow to each part of the pile, and oxygen is required for any decomposition to take place.

If maintaining a compost pile sounds like something that would interest you, start considering the different placement options. The hardest part about maintaining a pile is choosing a spot that provides enough square footage without intruding on the rest of

your yard or garden. While usually you can prevent the horrible odors that most people associate with compost heaps, it's still not a pleasant thing to have to look at whenever you go for a walk in your garden.

Mulching for Free

I'm sure that if you are reading this, you have used some form of

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mulch during your gardening career. However, you probably didn't know that there are many other options for organic mulching that you can explore. These days, many gardeners are discovering new sources of free mulch that has been there all along; an untapped resource. These include clippings from a lawn, or woody prunings from other plants in your yard. You will be surprised by how beneficial all these things can be, and how often the opportunity arises to use them.

Many gardeners have taken to spreading out their excess grass clippings across the rest of their yard. You may think this will look tacky, with big piles of grass just sitting in your yard as if you were too lazy to rake them up.

However, if you spread them out enough then you won't even be able to tell that there is an excess amount. Leaving the extra grass on the yard acts as a sort of mulch by preventing evaporation and weed growth. With this extra water, you won't have to water nearly as much to keep your grass green. When I started leaving my grass clippings, I had to adjust the frequency of my sprinkler system because I was worried my yard was getting too much water!

If your garden is in more need of mulching than your yard, it is not unheard of to rake up all the grass and transport it to your garden. By making a small layer around the vicinity of the plant, you'll apply all the same benefits from leaving it in your yard. My yard is rather green on its own, but I often have trouble with my plants staying green and healthy. So, rather than leave the grass clipping in my yard, I move them all around my plants. It is just a matter of choosing what your highest mulching priority is.

Sometimes, our pruning activities will lead us to have an amazing amount of branches and twigs. If this is the case, you should consider renting a wood chipper to put all of those branches to use. After one day of intense pruning, you would be surprised at just how many branches you end up with. Rather than throw these away, you can turn them into a huge amount of mulch for your plants. However, if your pruning has not left you with that big of an amount, you should bundle it all up and save it to add onto the next batch. This is because the chipping machines can be slightly expensive to rent, and you want it to be absolutely worth it!

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Over time, all organic mulches need to be replenished. This is because they will naturally decompose in the conditions of your yard. Usually you can tell for yourself just by looking at it, but sometimes it can look perfectly regular but still have problems. If you start to notice any poor plant growth whatsoever, you should replace your mulch. Always keep in mind that during the process of decomposition, your mulch will use up the valuable nitrogen in the soil. Without

this, the plants will be missing a key nutrient. There are several types of fertilizers available on the market that are specifically designed to deal with this problem.

The use of mulches in the yard and garden is something everyone should try. Not only can it save lots of time by reducing the amount of garbage you have to transport out, but it increases the healthiness and integrity of your plants by putting that so called garbage to good use. So if you think you would be able to save a good amount of branches and twigs for chipping, or if you think that you are ready to stop raking up all your grass clippings, then I think that mulching is for you.

My First Gardening Experience

Ah, to this day I still remember my first gardening experience. It was such a disaster that I didn't think I would ever want to garden again. I almost decided to turn my casual hobby into the most

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rage-inducing topic you could possibly bring up to me.

It all started a few weeks after I moved in to my first house. I was excited just to have my own grass to mow, since I had been in apartments and condos for quite a while. In between plans to paint walls and renovate the inside to exactly how I like, I thought it would be a good idea to start a fruit garden so that I could have some fresh produce and put my yard to use. At that point I didn't really know anything at all about gardening. But still in

my spunky youthful years, I decided I didn't need help. How hard could it be to start a garden and grow stuff? After all, it happens in nature all the time and nobody even has to do anything.

I already had a grassless patch in my yard where it looked like the previous owner had attempted a garden. But any attempt they had made turned out to be an utter travesty. The area was full of rocks and weeds, with no signs of any agreeable plants. I spent several hours of work spread over several days to clear out the entire area, leaving nothing but dirt. At that point, however, I didn't realize the difference between "dirt" and "soil". I was dealing with barren, hard, nutritionless, and unforgiving land.

I made some attempt at making my garden look nice; although I think even Martha Stewart would have had difficulties. I took some stained boards that were sitting in my basement (quite convenient, no?) and used them as a border for my garden, to keep out all the pests that couldn't jump more than a foot (I figured I would be safe from lawn gnomes). I used the pile of rocks I had collected from the garden to make a creepy shrine looking thing in front of it. I don't know what I was thinking when I did that.

I went to the store that very day, and picked out whatever looked tasty. Strawberries? Sure! Watermelon? Yeah! I hacked away a hole in the rock-hard ground and poked the seed in. After that, I think I watered it faithfully every day for several weeks before realizing that it was not going to grow anything. But even after I had that realization, I continued to water in hopes that my seeds would pull a last minute sprout on me. But I knew there was no hope, and I was heartbroken. After all those hours of pulling up weeds and tossing rocks into a pile, I had no fruit to show for my labor.

So, feeling dejected and betrayed, I logged onto the internet and searched for a guide to gardening. I quickly ran across a site that led me to realize the true skill required for gardening. It was then I learned about soil consistency, nutrients, ideal watering conditions, seasons, and all those things. After I read up on my area and how to grow fruits, I learned exactly what to do. I learned how to get the ideal soil, when to plant the seeds, how much to water, etc. Just a night of browsing the internet and printing off sources, and I was totally ready for the next planting season.

If you're in the position I was, and you're just itching to start a new garden... I urge you to learn from my mistake. Make sure you do plenty of proper research on the types of plants you're trying to grow, along with the climate. Spend money on good soil, good

fertilizer, and good garden tools. Hopefully you don't have to go through the emotional disaster that I went through.

Optimizing Your Garden for Drought or Water Conservation

Living in Colorado and being a gardener has been rather stressful in the past few years, as this state has been undergoing a rather severe drought. The city is imposing watering restrictions which are

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not giving enough water to lawns and plants. I've had to renovate my garden to make it more water efficient. Now, because of the techniques I've employed, I'm the only one in my neighborhood with a garden that isn't completely brown. So if you live in an area that is going through a drought or if you just want to save water, I suggest you use some of these techniques as well.

First, I took out all my plants. The soil I was using didn't

retain water very well, so I had to water about twice as much as necessary in order to get it to actually absorb into the roots. If you have this same problem, you can fix it by loading the soil up with lots of compost. This not only prevents water from escaping, but encourages the plant's roots to be healthy and able to survive more.

Once I was done optimizing the soil for my new low water consumption plan, I was ready to replace all my plants. I decided that the placement of all my plants would reflect the amount of water necessary to keep them alive. All the plants that don't require much water I placed in on one side of my garden, and then just progressed in the amount of required water to the other side of the garden. As a result of my new arrangement, I don't have to waste water on plants that don't need it as much.

The installation of a drip irrigation system was another move on my part that reduced the amount of water I needed to fully water my garden. The great thing about these systems is that they constantly drip into your plants, so that every single drop is absorbed. With traditional watering systems, usually the roots get too overwhelmed with the sheer amount of water in the soil. Thus, lots just seeps right past. This is all taken care of with the drip system.

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hummingbirds and butterflies with varieties like Cosmos and Yarrow. The best part about all these plants is that they don't look rugged and withstanding, but they sure are. Your neighbors won't be saying "Look at them, they downgraded their plants just to withstand the drought. What chumps!" Instead they will be marveling over how you keep your flowers so beautiful in the midst of the watering regulations.

One of my favorite drought resistant plants is the Lavender plant. I could go on for pages about it. A large group of Lavender plants looks unbelievably gorgeous in your garden, and hardly requires any water to flourish. Pineapple sage is another personal favorite. It

If you still seem to need more water than you can supply to your garden, you might consider which plants you could replace with less water dependent plants. If you want a good shrub that doesn't use up more than its share of water, look for Heavenly Bamboo. It is not only tolerant of droughts, but looks rather decorative in any garden. Herbs such as rosemary are useful in preparing meals, and are rarely thirsty.

If you're trying to find flowers that will still be lush and beautiful despite the lower amounts of water, look for penstemon varieties like Garnet, Apple Blossom, Moonbeam, and Midnight. You can attract

is a 2+ foot shrub that smells strangely of pineapple. It's another major attracter of hummingbirds, and the leaves are also useful to add taste to drinks.

So if you are in the position I was, and you're dealing with a drought and perhaps watering regulations, I suggest you try some of the things I've mentioned. Even if you're just trying to conserve water or be generally more efficient with it, I think you'll still be able to benefit.

Other Factors in Garden Creation

So now you've picked out what type of garden you will have, what the location will be, and what kind of fertilizer you need, now is the time to really get started in choosing your garden environment. First you'll want to choose what your garden barriers will be. What will separate your garden from the rest of the world? Next you'll want to choose the decorations and support for your plants. Often some kind of metal mesh is necessary to keep your plant standing

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up. You will also want to choose how much soil and fertilizer to buy, and how to arrange all the plants in your garden.

Choosing a border is actually a fairly important step in getting your garden started. It might not actually affect the well-being of the plants, but having a garden is a fairly aesthetic ordeal for many people anyways. So

usually you will want to choose between metal and wood. You can stack up boards around the perimeter of your garden, and give it a rather nice cabin look. If you're looking for a more modern look, you can obtain some metal lining at your local home improvement store for rather cheap, and installation is medium difficulty.

Finding something nice-looking to support your plants can be a little bit more challenging. Sometimes a short metal pole can work

well, but often for plants such as tomatoes you will need a wire mesh for it to pull itself up on. You can find these at any gardening store, usually pre-shaped in a sort of cone shape ideal for plants. The plant just grows up through it, and usually it will last until the plant is grown enough to support itself. After that you can take a pair of wire-cutters and just snip it free.

Deciding how much soil to buy can be slightly easier. Look up information on your plants and find out the ideal soil depth. Then dig out that much from your garden, take the measurements, and find out the exact amount of cubic feet of soil that you will need. Go to the store and buy it, preferably adding on a few bags just so you

can replenish the supply if it compresses or runs out.

If you live in an area where the ground is rough, dry, and barren of nutrients, then you might even want to add a few inches of depth to the original recommendation.

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Arranging the plants is rather important to the success of your garden. I'm not talking about some kind of feng-shui thing, but depending on your

watering, some plants might hog all the water and leave the other plants high and dry. Some plants have longer roots than others, and are more aggressive in the collection of water. If you place one of these plants next to a plant with weaker, shorter roots, it will quickly hijack the water supply for itself, and choke out the other plant.

I hope I've led you to realize that placement isn't the only important thing about a garden. There are many other factors that might not seem very significant, but spending a proper amount of time considering them could change the outcome of your garden. So if you're working on building a garden, use and reference you can (the library, the internet, and magazines) to look in to some of the factors I've mentioned.

Picking a Healthy Plant

When it comes to getting started with your garden, you have two choices; planting seeds, or buying entire plants. Both have their own benefits. If you plant seeds and care for them every day, you will find it is a much more rewarding experience when you have a full, healthy plant. However, this method is a lot more risky. I can't tell you how many seeds I've planted and never seen any trace of whatsoever.

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If you choose to buy the plant from a nursery and install it in your garden, it reduces a lot of the work involved in making it healthy. However, I have found in the past that many incompetent nursery workers will absolutely ruin the future of the plant by putting certain chemicals or fertilizers in. I have adapted to this incompetence by learning to choose the healthiest plant of the bunch. Here I will discuss some of the techniques I use in my screening process for plants.

It may sound superficial, but the one thing you need to check for on your prospective plants is how nice they look. As far as plants go, you can truly judge a book by its cover. If a plant has been treated healthily and has no diseases or pests, you can almost always tell by how nice it looks. If

a plant has grown up in improper soil, or has harmful bugs living in it, you can tell from the holey leaves and wilted stems.

If you're browsing the nursery shelves looking for your dream plant, you want to exclude anything that currently has flowers. Plants are less traumatized by the transplant if they do not currently have any flowers. It's best to find ones that just consist of buds. However if all you have to choose from are flowering plants, then you should do the unthinkable and sever all of them. It will be worth it for the future health of the plant. I've found that transplanting a plant while it is blooming results in having a dead plant ninety percent of the time.

Always check the roots before you plop down the money to purchase the plant. Of course if the roots are in absolutely terrible condition you will be able to tell by looking at the rest of the plant. But if the roots are just slightly out of shape, then you probably won't be able to tell just by looking at it. Inspect the roots very closely for any signs of brownness, rottenness, or softness. The roots should always be a firm, perfectly well formed infrastructure that holds all the soil together. One can easily tell if the roots are before or past their prime, depending on the root to soil ratio. If there are a ridiculous amount of roots with little soil, or a bunch of soil with few roots, you should not buy that plant.

If you find any abnormalities with the plant, whether it be the shape of the roots or any irregular features with the leaves, you should ask the nursery employees. While usually these things can be the sign of an unhealthy plant, occasionally there will be a logical explanation for it. Always give the nursery a chance before writing them off as horrendous. After all, they are (usually) professionals who have been dealing with plants for years.

So if you decide to take the easy route and get a plant from a nursery, you just have to remember that the health of the plants has been left up to someone you don't know. Usually they do a good job, but you should always check for yourself. Also take every precaution you can to avoid transplant shock in the plant (when it has trouble adjusting to its new location, and therefore has health problems in the future). Usually the process goes smoothly, but you can never be too sure.

Picking the Ideal Location for your Garden

Once you have picked what garden you want, there are many other factors you need to decide before you actually get to work with your gardening tools. Mainly you need to choose its location. This is usually decided by several factors: How you will water it, how much shade it needs, etc. Some of these questions can be very important in deciding whether your garden lives or dies, so don't take them lightly. You need to take each one into special consideration.

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Choosing the garden's location within your yard is one of the more important things to decide. You want to choose a location that will provide an ideal climate for the plants in your garden. I don't know what type of garden you're dealing with so I can't give you specific advice, but if you do a Google search for the plant you're dealing with then you'll find a plethora of sites informing you about the perfect conditions for its growing. After this, it's just a matter of finding the most

shaded or most sunny spot in your yard.

Another deciding factor is how you plan on watering your garden. If you have a sprinkler system already installed for your grass, then it could be a good idea to put your garden in the middle of your yard. Then it will get watered at the same time, and require no extra work from your part. But if this doesn't provide for a good location for your garden, then you might end up watering it by hose or dragging a sprinkler out there. In this case, just make sure your garden is within the ideal distance for a hose to reach. While this

might not seem like a good thing to base the entire location of your garden on, you'll be surprised at how nice it is to plan out in advanced.

Getting the perfect amount of shade for your garden can be a difficult endeavor. Once you have a basic idea for where you want your garden, you might want to watch it and record how many hours it spends in sunlight and how many it spends in shade. Compare your findings to an online web site, and you should be able to determine whether the spot you chose is ideal or not for planting and starting your garden in. Of course the amount will change as the seasons change, but this should give you a good idea

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of what to basically expect for the rest of the year. If necessary, later you can put up some kind of shade to protect your garden from getting too much sun.

After you've determined the ideal place for your garden and whether it has the right amount of sunlight, and whether you will be able to conveniently water it, you're one step closer to actually starting your garden. Of course there are other factors that I have overlooked here, but mostly you should be

able to decide whether your location is good or not based on common sense. Just think: If I were a plant, would I be able to flourish here? If you can honestly answer yes, then I think its time for you to head out to your local gardening store and buy the necessary soil and fertilizer to get started! Have fun!

Picking the Right Gardening Tools

If you're thinking about taking your gardening seriously and getting out there every day to increase the attractiveness of your garden,

then you will want to get the right tools to help you in this. You might be tempted to go out to the store and just buy the nearest things you see, but you'll be much happier if you put lots of thought into the styles and types of tools you're buying. There are styles designed just for gardening, and you'll be better off buying those.

You can find most of the tools you will need at your local gardening or home improvement shop. Usually the employees will be simply thrilled to assist you in finding the ideal tools. If you go to a shop that specializes in gardening, you can usually get some advice in addition to service. Gardening store employees are usually an untapped wealth of wisdom, and they are how I learned almost all that I know about gardening today.

If you are having a hard time finding the right tool or if you want to save some money, you might try looking online for the supplies you need. You'll have to pay the shipping costs and wait an extra week or two, but often if you buy more than one tool, the total savings will be worth it. You should always buy from a reputable seller, though, and search around beforehand for anything negative that people had to say about their buying experience.

As far as basic digging tools go, you might already have all you'll need. There are several types that you should get though, for different specific tasks. A round point shovel is good for digging holes for plants. A spade is necessary for all the more intricate work. A garden fork you might not use as much, but I have one in my tool shed and I've been thankful for it on multiple occasions. Having these different varieties of digging tools can help you to minimize the work you have to do. For example, if you try digging a big hole with a little spade then you'll end up rather tired. The same goes if you are attempting to do more detailed work with a big clumsy shovel.

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believe any gardener should have less than 3. There are so many useful varieties on the market that I have a hard time recommending just one, and that's why I'll tell you all the ones I usually use. The one I use the most is the onion hoe, which is very lightweight and ideal for small cultivations and weeding. The Warren hoe is a larger model, with a pointed end. If you need to make a hole or dig out a pesky weed, this is the one for you. There are several other varieties, but I recommend starting with the ones I mentioned. As you progress in your gardening savvy, you will find the need for more types.

Most people believe that gardening just consists of a simple spade. But there are many, many tools with many more variations that you will use in your gardening career. Usually you can start with just a few different tools, but you'll always find that you can use more varieties for special situations. It's just a matter of recognizing when one tool could be more efficient than another.

A rake is an absolute necessity. You most likely already have one, but I'm guessing it's a lawn rake and not a garden rake. There is definitely a difference, and if you try to use a lawn rake in a garden then you will not be happy with the results. Same if you buy a grading or a contractor's rake. You'll want to look for a bowhead rake. I've found these are the best for gardening purposes. They will provide you the maximum control and accuracy, so you don't accidentally tear up your precious plants.

As far as hoes go, I don't

Preparing Your Garden for the Winter

Some people believe that when the weather starts getting colder and the leaves start to fall, it is time to put away the gardening tools and wait until next spring to work on their garden again. Wrong. Winter is an important time to maintain your garden's health and assure yourself a good crop for next year. You may think that might take too long to prepare your garden, but the truth

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is that it takes less than one day to prepare your garden for the upcoming winter.

When the nighttime temperatures drop to less than forty-five degrees Fahrenheit for more than four days in a row, or frost is forecasted for your area (usually around late October or November) you know its time to begin preparing your garden. You should begin by evaluating your garden design, check which plants grew well in the past season, and which plants did not do well. Fall is a good time to decide which plants will remain in you garden next year, and which ones should go.

It is also a good time to decide which new plants you want to grow. To make your garden more colorful and healthy, be sure only to plant the more hardy plants during the fall so that they can withstand the winter. Some plants that will do fine being planted in fall are: rudbeckia, Aster Novi-belgii, Anemone Japonica, panicle hyandea, endive, escarole, and Brussels sprouts. You can find all of these and more in gardening magazines or your local nursery.

After you have finished this you should begin cleaning up your garden. Begin by pulling out weeds that may have cropped up, and raking fallen leaves. Weeds and rotten leaves can carry insects and

diseases that might be harmful to your garden. You should also rid your garden of spent annual plants, and harvest your vegetables and other plants that cannot withstand the winter weather. After fall has come and gone, the leaves will be off your trees and you can see the rotten branches. Trimming off the unwanted branches from your trees isn't necessary to your gardens health, but may help later on by not dropping branches on your plants and not blocking too much of the sun.

If you have younger trees you should consider wrapping them and supporting them with stakes to help them survive the winter wind and cold. Putting mulch over your garden for the winter can be a helpful way to protect plants from sudden temperature changes and heavy snow. For mulch you can use about five inches of shredded bark, pine needles, or a variety of other materials. You have to be careful not to mulch too early, because some insects may still be alive and able to take shelter in it for the winter.

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Once you are finished with your gardening tools you should clean them and make sure they are in a safe place where they won't rust and you know where they'll be for next year. Before winter comes you should always set out slug repellent, as slugs are one of the worst bugs to have in your garden. If you have a pool or fountain in your garden, be sure to take out any fish that you have in them and bring them inside. There's nothing sadder than a fish frozen in a block of ice.

Preparing Healthy Soil

If you're getting ready to go on a new garden venture, you need to prepare your soil to ideally house your plants. The best thing you can do in the soil preparation process is to reach the perfect mixture of sand, silt, and clay. Preferably there would be 40

percent sand, 40 percent silt, and 20 percent clay. There are several tests used by experienced gardeners to tell whether the soil has a good composition. First you can compress it in your hand. If it doesn't hold its shape and crumbles without any outside force, your sand ratio is probably a little high. If you poke the compressed ball with your finger and it doesn't fall apart easily, your soil contains too much clay.

If you're still not sure about the content of your soil, you can separate each ingredient by using this simple method. Put a cup or

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two of dirt into a jar of water. Shake the water up until the soil is suspended, then let it set until you see it separate into 3 separate layers. The top layer is clay, the next is silt, and on the bottom is sand. You should be able to judge the presence of each component within your dirt, and act accordingly.

After you've analyzed the content of your soil, if you decide that it is low on a certain ingredient then you should definitely do something to fix it. If dealing with too much silt or sand, it's best to add some peat moss or compost. If you've got too much clay, add a mixture of peat moss and sand. The peat moss, when moistens, helps for the new ingredient to infiltrate the mixture better. If you can't seem to manage to attain a proper mixture, just head down to your local gardening store. You should be

able to find some kind of product to aid you.

The water content of the soil is another important thing to consider when preparing for your garden. If your garden is at the bottom of an incline, it is most likely going to absorb too much water and

drown out the plants. If this is the case, you should probably elevate your garden a few inches (4 or 5) over the rest of the ground. This will allow for more drainage and less saturation.

Adding nutrients to your soil is also a vital part of the process, as most urban soils have little to no nutrients already in them naturally. One to two weeks prior to planting, you should add a good amount of fertilizer to your garden. Mix it in really well and let it sit for a while. Once you have done this, your soil will be completely ready for whatever seeds you may plant in it.

Once your seeds are planted, you still want to pay attention to the soil. The first few weeks, the seeds are desperately using up all the

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then add fertilizer regularly after that. Follow these simple steps, and you'll have a plethora of healthy plants in no time. And if you need any more details on an individual step, just go to your local nursery and enquire there. Most of the employees will be more than happy to give you advice.

nutrients around them to sprout into a real plant. If they run out of food, how are they supposed to grow? About a week after planting, you should add the same amount of fertilizer that you added before. After this you should continue to use fertilizer, but not as often. If you add a tiny bit every couple of weeks, that should be plenty to keep your garden thriving.

Basically, the entire process of soil care can be compressed into just several steps... ensure the makeup of the soil is satisfactory, make sure you have proper drainage in your garden, add fertilizer before and after planting,

The Horrors of Hail

One of the most hazardous things that can happen to your plants is weather. Many a garden has been demolished overnight because of this phenomenon. And seemingly, there is nothing we can do to prevent it. Of course, if weather didn't exist at all then we wouldn't have those nice sunny days that are beneficial to the growth of our plants. But then again, we wouldn't have the tragic hailstorms that tear down everything we've worked for so many hours to grow.

When rain starts to fall, usually the first reaction in a gardener is pure joy. After all, this means you don't have to worry about going out and watering it manually. The natural rain fall can't be anything but good for all your thirsty plants, can it? Well once that same gardener starts to see the gorgeous rain drops turn into small globules of ice, usually a complete emotional breakdown is in order. I know this from experience, because when I was a blooming gardener I had my garden completely demolished by about 10 minutes of severe hail.

When I first learned my lesson on the damage hail can do, I quickly devised a method of coping. I began to keep large clay pots within 10 feet of my garden, so that at any sign of hail I could run outside and have the plants sheltered in a matter of seconds. This saved me from being forced to watch my plants be ripped to pieces on multiple occasions. I've never dealt with hail more than an inch in diameter, but I'm guessing that if there had been any baseball sized chunks then those pots would have been quickly demolished.

However, as the number of fragile plants in my garden grew, it became slightly impractical to have a pot for each plant, and run outside to place each one before significant damage had already occurred. After much thought, I ended up building a horizontal, retractable screen mechanism made out of a strong but flexible wire mesh. At any sign of rain I could pull the screen out over my entire garden and have instant protection. Not only did it let the rain through, but the collected hail provided a steady drip of water for as much as a day afterwards. This project cost me several hundred dollars, and more blood, sweat, and tears than can be

measured with earth dollars. Therefore I wouldn't recommend it to everyone.

If it's too late for you, and you've recently lost your precious plants to those wicked balls of ice, then you're probably looking for some way to help the plants recover. Unfortunately there aren't many choices for you. The best thing you can do is give them the tender care they deserve, and attempt to nurse them back to health over a long period of time. The several weeks after being severely damaged by hail are vital to whether the plant survives or not. If you expect more rain or wind, you should keep the plant covered. In this brittle stage, even raindrops or a strong breeze could cause more damage.

So if you live in an area that experiences frequent hail, you should definitely have some emergency plan for protecting your plants. Sitting by and watching them be ripped to shreds should never be an option!

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The Psychology Behind Gardening

I don't know what it is about a garden that has always drawn humans to them. But they've always been very popular, and an integral part of peoples' lifestyles. Most religions feature gardens as the settings for some of the biggest events According to Christianity, humanity was started in a garden and the son of God was resurrected in a garden. The Buddhist build gardens to allow nature to permeate their surroundings. Almost every major palace and

government building has a garden. But what's so great about them? They're just a bunch of plants, after all.

Of course, the reasoning is fairly obvious behind why people grow food in gardens. It's to eat! If you live off the fat of the land and actually survive on stuff from your garden, it's easy to understand the reasoning. But I'm thinking about those people who plant flower gardens just for the sake of looking nice. There's no immediate benefit that I can see; you just have a bunch of flowers in your yard! However, after thinking extensively about the motivation behind planting decorative gardens, I've conceived several possible theories.

I think one of the reasons people love gardens so much is that while we have a natural desire to progress and industrialize, deep within all of us is a primal love for nature. While this desire might not be as strong as the desire for modernism, it is still strong enough to compel us to create gardens, small outlets of nature, in the midst of all our hustle and bustle. Since being in nature is like regressing to an earlier stage of humanity, we too can regress to a time of comfort and utter happiness. This is why gardens are so

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relaxing and calming to be in. This is why gardens are a good place to meditate and do tai chi exercises. A garden is a way to quickly escape from the busy world.

I've thought at times that perhaps we as humans feel a sort of guilt driving us to restore nature and care for it. This guilt could stem from the knowledge that we, not personally but as a race, have destroyed so much of nature to get where we are today. It's the least we can do to build a small garden in remembrance of all the trees we kill every day. It's

my theory that this is the underlying reason for most people to take up gardening as a hobby.

Gardening is definitely a healthy habit though, don't get me wrong. Any hobby that provides physical exercise, helps the environment, and improves your diet can't be a negative thing. So no matter what the underlying psychological cause for gardening is, I think that everyone should continue to do so. In the USA especially, which is dealing with obesity and pollution as its two major problems, I think gardening can only serve to improve the state of the world.

Of course I'm no psychologist; I'm just a curious gardener. I often stay up for hours wondering what makes me garden. What is it that makes me go outside for a few hours every day with my gardening tools, and facilitate the small-time growth of plants that would grow naturally on their own? I may never know, but in this case ignorance truly is bliss.

Using Gardening to Get in Shape

While gardening is usually thought of as a productive way to grow beautiful plants and obtain tasty fruits and vegetables, few gardeners have ever considered the immense amounts of exercise

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one can get in the process of gardening. While you can get almost as much muscle (if not more) exercise as you do working out, it is very productive at the same time.

You may wonder how gardening could possibly give as much exercise as working out. Just think about all the various facets of preparing a garden. There are holes to be dug, bags and pots to be carried, and weeds to be pulled. Doing all of these things help to work out almost every group of muscles in your body.

My brother is a fanatic about working out. Almost every time I call his house, I end up interrupting some muscle toning activity. I've never really enjoyed working out, though, as it seems that the constant lifting of heavy things just puts a strain on my body with no immediate positive results. But while he is into working out, I am almost equally enthusiastic about gardening. I work outside improving my garden almost every day. I think I definitely surprised my brother when he realized that I am almost as muscular as he is; but I have never lifted a single dumbbell!

Before you go out into your garden, you should always stretch out. Even if your goal isn't to work out and get exercise, it's still a good idea. Often gardeners spend long periods of time hunched over or bent over. This can be bad for your back. So not only should you stretch out before hand, but you should always take frequent breaks if you're spending long amounts of time in these positions.

Weeding and pruning are some of the best workouts a gardener can get. With the constant crouching and standing, the legs get a great workout. If your weeds are particularly resistant, your arms will become particularly toned just from the effort required to remove them from the ground. If you plan on taking the whole workout think very seriously, you should always be switching arms and positions to spread out the work between different areas of your body.

One of the most obvious ways to get exercise is in the transporting and lifting of bags and pots. Between the nursery and your house, you will have to move the bags multiple times (to the checkout, to your car, to your garden, and then spreading them out accordingly). As long as you remember to lift with your legs and not your back, transporting bags and pots can give you a fairly big workout, even though you probably don't make those purchases very often.

Mowing your grass can also be a great exercise. If you've got an older mower that isn't self propelled, just the act of pushing it through the grass will give you more of a workout than going to the gym for a few hours. During the course of mowing the grass, you use your chest, arms, back, and shoulder to keep the mower ahead of you. Your thighs and butt also get worked a lot to propel the mower. Not only do you get an all around muscle work out, but it

can improve your heart's health. It's good for you as a cardiovascular activity, as well as a great way to lose weight due to the increased heart rate and heavy breathing.

If you plan on using gardening as a way to get in shape or lose some weight, you can hardly go wrong. Just be sure to stretch out, drink plenty of water, and apply sunscreen. As long as you take steps to prevent the few negative effects such as pulled muscles, dehydration and sunburn, I think you'll have a great time and end up being a healthier person because of it.

Using Rain Barrels to Survive Droughts

If you're a gardener that has an unlimited supply of water, consider yourself lucky. There are many of us who live in drought zones where the garden and lawn watering rules are very constrictive to the healthy growth of gardens and plants. Many people just give up when they find out how few gallons of water they are permitted to use, but some of us have just found ways to cope with less water. There are many ways to optimize ones garden to conserve water while still keeping it lush.

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Some of the ways include drip irrigation (the use of a pipe or hose with small holes to gradually seep into the roots of the plant), the placement of plants in groups of equal watering needs (to prevent wasting water on plants that don't need it), and using compost or mulch to insulate the water and prevent drainage.

But one of the best ways to keep your garden alive during a drought

is to take preventative measures. Occasionally a drought will be predicted far in advanced, or those already experiencing a drought will be given a few weeks of heavy rain. When this occurs, you should take the opportunity to set up several rain barrels. Many people think this would be a time consuming, silly thing to do. But it can save you many gallons of water, and hardly requires any work.

Finding the barrels will probably be the hardest part. You can use your own garbage cans, or head to your home improvement store to get a few 55 gallon plastic drums. These can be expensive and difficult to transport, so keep that in mind before you go to the store. You will probably want to cover the top of the barrel with a

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screen of some sort to filter out any unwanted leaves or debris that might fall off the roof of your house.

Once you have your barrels ready, you're faced with the decision of where to place them. Usually during rainfall, there is one corner or segment of the house that rain tends to pour off of. If you are taking the simple approach to barrel placement, just place the barrel under all the places where you see large amounts of drips. However, while this might be the easiest way to place them, you won't see very high volumes of rain in the barrels.

If you want to take a more complicated approach to placing the barrels, you should consider tweaking your gutter system a bit. If you remove each individual segment and place it at a very

slight slant so that all the water is diverted to the nearest corner of the house, you can place a rain barrel at each corner. So

essentially your entire house acts as a catcher for the rain, instead of just a few feet worth of shingles. This is how to maximize the amount of water your rain barrel will catch.

After a heavy rainfall, each individual barrel probably won't see very much rain. If it looks like it won't be raining more any time soon, it's a good idea to empty each barrel into one main central barrel. Seal it and save it out of the way, for whenever you may need it. Then the next time it starts to rain, you'll be able to quickly put all your catching barrels into place without having to lug around all the water you've accumulated so far.

The use of water barrels might sound like an antiquated idea. However, when you're in the midst of a drought and you're able to spare that extra couple of gallons for your garden in addition the city allotment, you'll be grateful for every bit of time and money you spent on collecting all that rain. All it takes is a few trips out in the backyard every time it starts to sprinkle, and you'll be a very happy gardener when water isn't so abundant.

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Using Vines to Decorate your Garden

A great way to decorate your garden is the use of vines. They are very low maintenance and look good on almost anything. If you've got a fence or separator that really stands out in the field of green that is your garden, then growing a vine over it can be a quick and aesthetically pleasing solution. However, there are many types of vines for different situations, whether you are trying to grow it up the side of a house, along the ground, or up a tree.

Many different ground vines are available. These types grow fast

and strong, and just inch their ways along the ground. They are very easy to direct, so they can make a border around your garden, or just weave in and out of the plants. I suggest using these as a hardy ground cover if you just want some green on your dirt or mulch. Usually you can find a variety that is resistant to being stepped on. It's like a leafy, nice alternative to grass. Even if you have kids and a dog, it should have no problems staying alive.

Another type of vine that is available is a "twining" vine. This refers to their method of climbing. Twining vines require a lattice or equally porous surface to climb up, since they are not sticky at all. They just climb by sending out small tendrils to loop around whatever is nearby. I suggest using this type of vine for climbing up trees, or any type of mesh. Usually you have to guide them a lot more during their early stages, and after that they will go wherever you want them to.

Vines not only look good on the ground or on lattices, you can blend them in to the very architecture of your house. This is usually achieved through the use of vines with small tendrils that have adhesive tips. They extend from the vine and attach themselves to almost any surface. If your garden is adjacent to your house and you want something to camouflage the big unsightly wall, it's a great idea to start out a few vines near the base. If you have a vine like the Virginia Creeper growing, then your entire wall will be covered in a matter of months. However I have seen situations where the vine got out of control. After that, you have no choice but to watch the vine take over your entire house.

One of the vines that you would probably recognize is Ivy. You see it around a lot, generally because it is so adaptable. Out of the types I mentioned above (ground, twining, and sticky pads), Ivy can fill in for pretty much anything. It makes a great ground cover, and will grow up about any surface you put it on. Although it grows quick and strong, I wouldn't suggest growing it up your house. This is because recently, buildings which have had ivy for many years have found that it has been deteriorating the building.

So no matter what you want to do with a vine, you should have no problem getting it to grow. You should always do your research beforehand and find out about any negative qualities the vine has (such as its ability to destroy buildings, in Ivy's case.)

Using Xeriscaping to Save Time and Water

While having a full fledged garden is rewarding and enjoyable, lots of people simply don't have the time that is required to maintain it.

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your area is undergoing a drought, you should check with the water suppliers and see if they are offering lessons. If you attend those, you will be able to get advice specific to your region (IE types of plants to grow, how much to water them, etc).

To some, the name Xeriscaping conjures the image of a yard that consists of a giant rock bed. However, this is known as "zero scaping", and it is a considerably different concept. It focuses on reducing your yard to nothing that requires any maintenance whatsoever. Unfortunately this is usually just rocks. But this

Whether you have too much going on at work or too many kids to take care of, you should never try to operate a garden if you don't think you can handle it.

For those people who are just too busy for a normal garden, I would suggest a somewhat recent method of gardening known as Xeriscaping. This minimal yet stylish theory first emerged in Colorado when water levels were at an all time low. It is a great method of having a great looking yard or garden, without having to maintain it or water it very often at all.

Here in Colorado, many places are offering free Xeriscaping lessons in order to encourage the conservation of water. If

shouldn't be your goal. While keeping maintenance at a minimum, it is still possibly to retain a nice looking yard that won't attract the negative attention of everyone who passes by.

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This might sound like it would be hard to implement without making your yard into a hideous mess, but this is not so at all. The theory basically involves choosing plants which are low maintenance to begin with, then putting them each

in environments that are ideal. It is usually applied by figuring out what side of the house to place it on to get the best amount of shade, and figuring out how to group it with plants with similar water needs.

To get started in your Xeriscaping renovation, you first need to pick out all the plants you will be using. They should for the most part require a low amount of water. This doesn't mean you can only grow cactuses in your yard. Just cut back on the really thirsty plants that you have to water every day to keep alive. You'll want to stick with local plants for the most part, and don't go with anything too exotic as these generally require larger amounts of water.

The second most important principle of xeriscaping is placing the plants in ideal areas. If you place them all together with plants that require essentially the same amount of water, then you will end up saving lots of water. Also place the plants in areas where they will be protected from wind or excessive sun, depending on the needs of the plants. Xeriscaping is almost the same thing as microclimating, just with more of a focus on adaptation to harsh conditions rather than avoiding them. So if it sounds good to you and you're looking to save time and water by renovating your garden, you should look for xeriscaping lessons.

All Resources

[Bonsai Gardening Secrets](#). Discover Over 95 Pages Of Insider Secrets To Creating Stunning Bonsai Trees.

[The Hypertufa How-To Manual](#). 100 Page EBook On How To Make Garden Art Objects From Hypertufa. Easy To Follow Instructions & Expert Advice.

[Companion Planting](#). Learn How To Design An Organic Food System Where Your Plants Do The Work, Creating A High Yield, Healthy, Beautiful Garden.

[The Hydroponic Garden Secrets Guide](#). Hydroponics Secrets Shows You How To Grow The Plants, Fruits And Vegetables -even In Limited Space--without Using Soil. An Amazi.

[Help Us Feed Millions Of People!](#) Produce 5-10 Times More Food While Using 1/2 The Water! World-renowned Mittleider Gardening Books, CDs Videos & Software Show You How! Affiliates Earn 40% & Help Others Automatically As This Non-Profit Foundation Teaches Families To Feed Themselves.

[Diy Japanese Garden](#). Easy Step By Step Guide To Make You Own Japanese Garden, With Pictured Sample Garden Designs.

[The Home Of Indoor Plant Care Info](#). We Provide Indoor Plant Care Information For The Homeowner, Garden Center Personnel, And Plantscape Technicians.

[Self-Sufficient-Life.com](#). Keeping And Raising Chickens And Poultry. Build A Chicken Coop. Growing Your Own Fruit And Vegetables. Beekeeping (Honey Bees). Herbal Remedies, Herbs, Remedy. Hydroponic Gardening, Hydroponics Garden. Building Your Own Greenhouse.

[The Eco-Efficient Organic Garden Bed Guide](#). Low Maintenance, High Yield Organic Garden Bed. Learn How To Grow Organic Vegetables Faster, Bigger And Tastier With One Of The Most Advanced Organic Methods Exists Today. Comprehensive & Fully Illustrated Guide. See Examples On Pitch Page.

[What You Need To Know About Bonsai Gardening!](#) Brand New Ebook! Amazing Techniques Revealed On How To Grow Shockingly Beautiful Bonsai!

[Square Watermelon Secrets Revealed!](#) Instant Buzz Home Garden Ebook. Author Grew His Own Square Watermelon And Shows How To. Its Great Fun And Curiosity.

[Home Vegetable Gardening Guide.](#) A Complete Guide To The Planting And Care Of Vegetables, Fruit, And Berries.

[The Real Gardener's Book.](#) Get A Beautiful Garden - Easy, Inexpensive, And Rewarding - Simple Steps To Follow! Only Product With Book And Audio Mp3 Book !

[Your Perfect Lawn.](#) Step By Step Guide On Building And Maintaining A Perfect Garden Lawn.

[How To Plant & Care For Your Rose Garden.](#) New Guide Reveals Tips, Tricks & Techniques You Can Use To Consistently Grow Gorgeous, Healthy Roses With Ease!

[Worm Farms Diy.](#) How To Build And Manage A Worm Farm To Suit The Average Family. Recycle Household Organic Waste Into Fertiliser For Your Garden And Help The Environment Too.

[Home, Deck And Garden Projects.](#) Fifteen Home And Deck Project Plans, Spiral Stairs, Whirlpool Spa, Spa Wood Heater, Retractable Awning, Compost Tumbler, Under Deck Roofing, Double Carport, Trimmer Mower, Abrasive Saw, Patio, Miter Saw Table, Pot Rack, Joggle Board, Pool Heat, Ping Pong.

[Organic Gardening Secrets.](#) Discover The Secrets To Organic Gardening. Great Conversions. Easy To Promote. We Cloak Your Affiliate Link. Get Your Custom Lin.

[Cinder Block Gardens Ebook.](#) Grow More Food In Less Space And In Less Time. Finally, Gardening Made Simple And Easy, The Way Gardening Should Be!

[4 Great Gardening Ebooks For One Very Low Price.](#) Discover Easy Tips And Advice To Get The Most Beautiful Garden, The Perfect Lawn And Learn About Organic Secrets And The Fascinating World Of Wild Flowers.

[How To Garden In A Dry Climate.](#) The Private Home Gardener, Primarily In A Dry Climate, Hungry For Hands-on Information From A Seasoned Professional Of Nearly 25 Years Experience, Gardening In Israel A Hot And Thirsty Country.

[Make Money From Greenhouse.](#) The Most Thrilling Pursuit In Amateur Horticulture Today Is Certainly Greenhouse Gardening. This Book Will Turn Your Hobby Into Profit!

[Cultivate The Magic!](#) The Number One Guide To Easy Container Gardening. Helpful, Clear Straight Forward Step By Step Instructions For Indoor And Outdoor Gardeners. Lower Your Stress! Improve Your Enviornment! Come To The Plant Zone And Cultivate The Magic!

[Free Organic Vegetable Gardening At Home.](#) Learn How To Start Up Or Enhance Your Own Organic Vegetable Garden At Home. Everyone Can Save Money On Food Bills And Produce Superior Fruit And Vegetables.

[How To Build Auto Lawn Sprinklers.](#) Build Your Own Automatic Lawn Sprinkler System. - Newly Increased Commissions!

[Your Lawn Care Business Marketing Plan.](#) How To Double Your Lawn Care Business In The Next 30 Days.

[Lawn Care EBook\(R\) - High Pay - High Conv.](#) High Paying Commissions And High Converting Sales Letter For This Lawn Care EBook(R).

[Your Perfect Lawn.](#) Step By Step Guide On Building And Maintaining A Perfect Garden Lawn.

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