

From:



Beginner Gardening Primer

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Seven Elements for First Garden Success

Inside or outdoors, gardening is both a popular and satisfying leisure time activity. There are many different ways to grow plants and places in which to grow them. Although plants have different needs, all plant care has seven factors in common.

Space: The first thing in growing plants is deciding where to put them. Choose from a variety of pots in different types and sizes, window boxes, greenhouses, beds, borders, and of course the garden plot.

Space for plants also means giving them the room they need to grow. Some plants do well bunched closely together, while others, like large trees, may require several feet of room between them.

Nutrition. Plants get the nutrients they need mainly from their growing medium. Today's gardeners can opt for many different mediums and methods of growing plants.

When growing plants outdoors, a soil test provides you with information on the composition of your soil. Depending on the type of plant you want to grow, you may need to "amend" your soil to provide your plants with necessary drainage, moisture retention, and the organic compounds.

NPK Fertilizers contain nitrogen (N), potassium (P), and potash (K). Each component serves a purpose. However, fertilizers are a plant supplement and not the main meal! Real nutrition for soil-grown plants comes from soil rich with organic compounds.

Potted plants grow in various potting mixtures depending on the cultivars and the method used to grow them. Along with soil based and part soil growing mediums, some plants grow without soil! Hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic gardening are three forms of soil-less gardening.

Temperature. Growing plants at the right temperatures is essential for successful gardening. Winter hardy plants that do well in temperate areas frequently won't tolerate warm climates.

Conversely, tropical plants typically won't withstand frost and need to live indoors during cold northern winters. Houseplants, as well, also have maximum and minimum temperature requirements.

Light. Light is the most important factor in plant growth. During photosynthesis, plants use light to collect carbon dioxide molecules and convert them into sugar, an energy-producing nutrient for plants.

Outdoor light classifications may be from shade to full sun, with varying degrees of light tolerances, such as "part shade" or "part sun", in between. Indoor classifications are often termed as "bright light", "bright-filtered light", "indirect light", and "low light".

Water. Of course, you'll need to water your plants. However, when and how much vary from variety to variety of plant. Some plants require constantly moist soil, while others like a good drink, but won't tolerate wet feet and some plants, like cacti, need very little water at all!

Air. Plants breathe just like people do and like people, need fresh clean air. However, in addition to the air above ground, many plants "breathe" through the soil as well.

Time. Ecclesiastes says it best. "There's a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted".

As well as when to plant and when to pluck, time is also important for knowing when to divide certain cultivars like tulips, when to prune shrubs, when to bring tender plants indoors, and when to set them outside.

If you provide your plants with the first six necessities and add a drop of patience, in due time you'll have a successful garden!

A Successful Garden Plot

The benefits of the home garden are many. As well as the near infinite number of plants you can grow, gardening mixes relaxation with exercise. The home garden adds beauty to your landscape, value to your property, and increases your quality of life. Flowers offer aesthetic value and fruit and/or vegetable gardens provide the additional benefit of adding money to your pocket by cutting your food costs.

The final benefit of a successful garden is the satisfaction of true accomplishment. Even if you're a beginner, you can experience the satisfaction of a successful gardening if you start with a good garden plan and the right gardening tools.

Do Plan Your Garden

Start small.

The beginning garden is an experiment. You'll find out which plants you enjoy growing and how much you'll reap from what you sow. In addition, first year gardens are more work than second and third year gardens. Generally, to plant a first-year garden you'll need to till new ground. Gardening in large, previously unplanted areas can be overwhelming. Even if you add garden soil, you'll spend more time weeding a first-year garden than an established plot. A twenty to thirty square foot area is sufficient to let you experience the satisfaction of a successful harvest with a minimum of work.

Know your plants before you plant them.

You'll need to choose plants for your new garden according to the soil that best suits them and the light they need to grow.

Time is also a variable factor in gardening. As well as varying in the time from planting to harvest, cultivars have different care requirements while they're growing. Some require little care other than an occasional weeding and others require daily care for successful growing.

Know what you can expect to reap before you sow. Vegetables like carrots and onions usually grow one plant per stem, while you may get a bucket full of potatoes from a single hill, depending on the variety you plant. Green beans are prolific after bloom as are many vining plants such as cucumbers, zucchini, and pumpkins. Green beans, tomatoes, peppers, onions, carrots, and potatoes are all easy-to-grow plants in the beginning vegetable garden. Easy grow flowers include petunias, marigolds, violets, and of course, flower bulbs are little growth factories that require little effort from your green thumb after planting.

After you've chosen plants to grow, the next part of planning your garden is deciding how you'll grow them.

Seed or Transplants?

You can grow plants either from transplants or from seed. Many seed packets contain more seeds than you'll need for your first garden, yet a packet of seeds is less expensive than most transplants and many plants are as easy and in some cases easier to start from seed. However, because most seeds are relatively inexpensive, you lose little if you don't plant a complete packet of seed. Remember that you are gardening for enjoyment as well as a successful harvest. You'll have a better gardening experience if you keep rows small and plant a variety of plants than if you limit your garden space to only one or two types of plants.

When you've made your planting decisions, outline your garden plan on paper. A paper gardening plan helps keep spring planting fever at bay when you actually plant your beginning garden! After you've completed your garden plan, assemble the tools you'll need to plant your garden.

Basic Garden Tools

Although the first step in creating a new garden is tilling the soil, you needn't invest in a roto-tiller to start your first garden. If you've never used a tiller, you may want to consider hiring a handyman to till your soil. If you'd rather make your beginning garden a do-it-yourself project from start to finish, you can usually find roto-tillers for rent at most rental shops and many garden supply stores. However, you will need to assemble some good gardening hand tools.

1. ***Gardening gloves.*** The first hand tool you'll need is something to protect your hands. Fingers that are unused to gardening can quickly develop blisters. In addition, gardening gloves will protect your hands from sharp sticks and stones in your first garden as well as prickly leaves and stems.
2. ***Garden kneelers.*** When beginning gardening, don't overlook the stress that digging, weeding, and even harvesting can place on your knees. Garden kneelers can be as simple as a piece of styrofoam. Kneeling mats are also sold especially for gardening or you may choose to invest in kneeling apparel that you won't need to carry from place to place in your garden.

3. **Long handled shovel and/or garden spade.** Shovels are great tools for digging new ground and distributing compost on old ground. They're also great for shoveling piles of garden debris into your wheelbarrow. Garden spades are excellent tools for planting and for getting to the bottom of a problem weed. Although you won't use shovels or spades everyday, once you have them you'll find they are indispensable. If you don't have them, you'll find that at some point you'll wish you did!
4. **Garden Rake.** Unlike your leaf rake, the garden rake is a sturdy rake, usually with short, strong steel teeth. You'll first use your garden rake to smooth and level your newly tilled garden. Throughout the growing season, a garden rake is a handy implement for keeping soil between rows loose and weed free.
5. **Garden Cart.** Garden carts haul refuse away from and haul compost to your garden space. Garden carts come in many styles from four-wheeled models that have shelves or attachments for holding small hand tools to the traditional three-wheeled wheelbarrow. A garden cart for your beginning garden may be as simple as your child's coaster wagon.
6. **Garden Hoe.** You'll need to keep soil loose and weeds away from your plants. It's much easier to hoe a row in your garden while standing than going from plant to plant on your knees. In addition, a garden hoe can be used to outline rows for transplants and make rows for seeding your beginner garden.
7. **Hand Trowel.** A hand trowel can take the shape of a short handled garden hoe or a garden cultivator with several long prongs. Hand trowels are especially useful for getting in close to weed and aerate delicate cultivars without damaging the plants.
8. **Gardening shears.** As well as trimming plants to keep them looking good, gardening shears are handy for removing damaged areas of plants to keep them healthy. Flower gardeners will certainly want to keep a pair of gardening shears nearby for cutting fresh bouquets to bring indoors. You'll also use your garden shears to cut back your hardy perennials at the end of the growing season.
9. **Garden Hose.** The essential possession for beginner gardening, you'll use your garden hose to water individual plants after planting and wash loose soil from sidewalks, driveways, and paved garden paths. In addition, you'll use it to hose off other garden tools, including your most important garden tools, your hands. In the summer, you may want to attach a sprinkler to your garden hose to irrigate your garden or to provide an afternoon's entertainment for your children under the hot summer sun.

A good garden plan combined with an assortment of basic garden tools takes the work out of gardening and makes it into an enjoyable and satisfying pastime. Working with the elements, plotting a garden with a good plan, and acquiring a few basic gardening tools solves the mystery of gardening and puts you on the trail to a successful beginner garden.

About Gardening-Guides.com

HDK-BeheerBV company is the parent company of Gardening-Guides.com. Started in 2004, Gardening-Guides.com is the brainchild of webmaster Hans Dekker. It's his vision to offer you a panoramic view of gardening.



In addition to being the trailblazer for Gardening-Guides.com, Hans is also a talented Internet businessman and owner of Net Research, Netherlands. Starting with just a few articles on Holland bulbs and tulips, Hans has not only used his Internet expertise to grow a virtual garden that holds dozens of cultivars, but he has also cultivated a team of talented writers that provides you with ever-fresh news and insights into every type of gardening you can imagine.

The mission of gardening-guides.com is to provide you, the gardener with quality information about year-round gardening, garden related topics and the resources you need to find the plants, tools, and other gardening products you need to grow a successful and satisfying garden.

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