



Getting Started With GARDENING: What You Need To Know

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Getting Started With GARDENING: What You Need To Know

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 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

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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.

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 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.

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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.

Choosing a Garden that is Perfect For You

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

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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 will be attracted due to the sweetness. You not only have to deal with having just the right dirt and fertilizer, you 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!

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.

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.

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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 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 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.

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

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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 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

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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.

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 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.

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

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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 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 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, 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.

Choosing and Planting Perennials

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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.

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.

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.

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 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 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 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 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.

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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.

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 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.

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 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

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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.

Getting Started in Container Gardening

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

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Getting Started With Gardening

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 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.

Gardening Info Product Resources

[The Shoestring Gardener](#) - Fully Illustrated, 300 Page Ebook Is A Compendium Of Hundreds Of Eco-friendly, Creatively Frugal Gardening How-tos, Remedies & Tips.

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