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# UNDERSTANDING **GARDENING** BASICS TO BOOST YOUR GARDENING **SUCCESS**



## NAVIGATING THE GARDEN CENTER

- Some provide maps at the center or online
- Most display plants in the following categories:
  - **ANNUALS**
    - ♦ Sun lovers displayed out in the open
    - ♦ Shade lovers displayed under shade cloth
    - ♦ Annuals in either category may be arranged
      - Alphabetically
        - \* A-Z by common name
        - \* A-Z by botanical name
      - By preferred growing conditions
        - \* Sun
        - \* Shade
        - \* Moist
        - \* Dry
      - By use
        - \* Cut flower
        - \* Pollinator friendly
        - \* Other...
      - New introductions
  - **PERENNIALS**
    - ♦ Sun lovers displayed out in the open
    - ♦ Shade lovers displayed under shade cloth
    - ♦ Annuals in either category may be arranged
      - Alphabetically
        - \* A-Z by common name
        - \* A-Z by botanical name
      - By preferred growing conditions
        - \* Sun
        - \* Shade
        - \* Moist
        - \* Dry
      - By use
        - \* Cut flower
        - \* Pollinator friendly
        - \* Other...

## • TREES & SHRUBS

- ♦ Sun lovers displayed out in the open
- ♦ Shade lovers displayed under shade cloth
- ♦ Trees and shrubs may be arranged
  - Alphabetically
    - \* A-Z by common name
    - \* A-Z by botanical name
  - Deciduous (lose leaves in winter)
    - \* Separate from evergreens
  - Trees separate from shrubs

## PLANNING THE GARDEN

- Determine your goals
  - **VEGETABLE GARDENS**
    - ♦ Produce to enjoy fresh
    - ♦ Enough to preserve
    - ♦ Vegetables your family likes to grow
    - ♦ Vegetables economical to grow
  - **FLOWER GARDENS**
    - ♦ Attract and support pollinators and birds
    - ♦ Edible flowers
    - ♦ Flowers to cut for bouquets
    - ♦ Provide seasonal interest

## YOUR DESIGN AND MAINTENANCE PREFERENCES

- Manageable size and number of beds
- Start small and increase with experience
- Consider time throughout the growing season
  - Planting
  - Weeding
  - Harvesting
  - Clean up
- All parts of the garden are accessible
  - Wide row vegetable garden with paths between
    - ♦ 4' wide beds provide easy access
    - ♦ Paths big enough for your feet and maneuvering

## Diggers Hotline

WISCONSIN'S ONE-CALL CENTER 811.

Diggers Hotline was established in 1976 to increase worker and public safety, prevent damage to underground and overhead facilities, protect the environment and to help ensure continuity of utility and communication services. Wisconsin's one-call center has helped millions of callers obtain information on the location of underground facilities and safe working distances from overhead lines.

[Learn More](#)





- Flowerbeds
  - ♦ At least 3' deep for impact - when possible
  - ♦ All parts accessible from edges
  - ♦ Internal steppers and paths for access within large beds
- Easy to manage area around the garden
- **Edge garden beds**
  - Slows infiltration of weeds and grass
  - Contains mulch
  - Easier mowing

## **FLOWER GARDEN DESIGN TIPS**

- **Color in the garden**
- **Few species**
  - More of each
    - ♦ Reduces maintenance
    - ♦ Greater impact

## **SELECTING THE RIGHT PLANT FOR YOUR GARDEN**

- Suited to the growing conditions
  - **SUNLIGHT**
    - ♦ Monitor sunlight throughout the year and throughout the day
      - ◉ Full sun
        - \* 6, preferably 8 or more, hours of direct sunlight
      - ◉ Part sun
        - \* 4 to 6 hours of direct sunlight
      - ◉ Part shade
        - \* 2 to 4 hours of direct sunlight
      - ◉ Shade
        - \* 2 hours of direct sunlight or bright, indirect light throughout the day
    - ♦ Morning sun is less intense and a good option for part shade plants

- ♦ Afternoon sun is more intense and usually hotter, making it a better match for full to part sun plants
- **SOIL CONDITIONS**
  - ♦ Clay
  - ♦ Sand
  - ♦ Silt
  - ♦ Moisture
    - ◉ Rainfall or what you can provide
- **Plant hardiness**
- **Suited to the length of the growing season**
  - Average last spring frost to first fall frost
    - ♦ Determine if you can plant seeds directly in the garden
      - ◉ **Marigolds**
      - ◉ **Zinnias**
      - ◉ **Beans**
      - ◉ **Cucumbers**
    - ♦ Start with transplants
      - ◉ **Tomatoes**
      - ◉ **Petunia**
- **ANNUAL**
  - From start to end of life cycle in one year
    - ♦ **Cosmos**
    - ♦ Marigolds
    - ♦ **Sunflowers**
  - Some plants that are annual in cold climates are actually perennials in milder locations
    - ♦ **Geraniums** (*Pelargonium*)
    - ♦ **Wax Begonia**
    - ♦ **Lantana**
  - Tender annual
    - ♦ Sensitive to frost
      - ◉ **Impatiens**
      - ◉ **Coleus**



### **About Melinda**

Nationally known gardening expert, TV/radio host, author & columnist Melinda Myers has over 30 years of horticulture experience and has written over 20 gardening books, including *Can't Miss Small Space Gardening*, the *Midwest Gardener's Handbook 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* released 2022, and *Jackson and Perkins' Beautiful Roses Made Easy*. She hosts the nationally-syndicated "Melinda's Garden Moment" program airing on over 115 TV and radio stations throughout the U.S. Melinda also hosts the internationally distributed Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" DVD series and Instant Video, including the latest *Food Gardening for Everyone* DVD set. She is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine, writes the twice monthly "Gardeners' Questions" newspaper column and a nationally-distributed gardening column. She appears regularly as a guest expert on national and local television and radio shows.

Visit Melinda's website,  
**[melindamyers.com](http://melindamyers.com)**



- Half-hardy annual
  - ◆ Can tolerate cool air and soil, but damaged by frost
    - Ageratum
    - Lobelia
    - Petunia
- Hardy annual
  - ◆ Tolerates cold soil, cold air and frost
    - Alyssum
    - Pansies
- **BIENNIAL**
  - From seed forms basal foliage the first season, overwinters, then second season it grows more leaves, flowers, sets seeds and dies
    - ◆ Hollyhocks
    - ◆ Foxglove
    - ◆ Tall Verbena
  - Some growers start biennials early, so they bloom and die the first year in the garden
- **PERENNIAL**
  - From seed may just grow leaves the first year, second and subsequent years they grow and flower
    - ◆ First year they sleep
    - ◆ Second year they creep
    - ◆ Third year they leap
- **SELF-CLEANING / FREE FLOWERING**
  - No deadheading needed
    - ◆ Annuals
      - Calibrachoa
      - Ageratum
      - Angelonia
    - ◆ Perennials
      - Willow Amsonia
      - Bugbane
      - Turtlehead

## THE WELL-TENDED PERENNIAL GARDEN BY TRACY DISABATO-AUST

### TERMS TO KNOW

- **D - DETERMINATE**
  - These tomatoes grow a certain size and stop
  - All the fruit tends to ripen in a relatively short period of time
  - Great for containers, hanging baskets or training on short supports or in towers
- **I - INDETERMINATE**
  - These tomatoes continue to grow, flower and produce new fruit throughout the season
  - Many gardeners pinch out the growing tips about a month before the average first fall frost
    - ◆ This stops the plants from growing new flowers and fruit that are unlikely to ripen before the killing frost
  - You'll need tall stakes and big towers to keep these large plants upright
- **DWARF**
  - Smaller than the species, but may not be as small as you think it will be
    - ◆ Techny arborvitae is smaller than the American arborvitae (grows up to 60' tall), but most gardeners did not expect it to grow 15' tall
      - Technito is shorter than Techny
- **COMPACT**
  - Shorter and bushier than its parent plant
  - Many are perfect for containers, window boxes and hanging baskets

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## • DISEASE RESISTANCE CODES

- V (Verticillium)
- F (Fusarium)
- FF (Fusarium Races 1 & 2)
- FFF (Fusarium Races 1, 2 & 3)
- N (Nematode)
- T (Tobacco Mosaic Virus)
- LB (Late Blight)
- EB (Early Blight)
- St (Stemphylium Gray Leaf Spot)
- A (Alternaria Stem Canker)
- C (Cladosporium Leaf Mold)
- TSWV (Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus)
- Johnny's Seeds has a comprehensive list of these

## • AAS - ALL-AMERICA SELECTIONS

- Plants with this designation have been tested nationally and selected for their suitability for home gardens
- Winners have improved flavor, growth habit, disease resistance or other quality that makes them better than varieties that are already on the market

## • NATIVE

- Definitions vary and some look to natives from their region, country or continent
- According to wildflower.org, "A plant that occurs naturally in the place where it evolved." (without intervention from people)

## • NATIVAR

- Cultivar (bred by people) of a native plant
- Usually to provide more contained growth, shorter more compact growth, different flower color...

## • H - HEIRLOOM

- Most agree an heirloom is a plant variety that has been around for more than 50 years, preserved and kept true to its parentage

## • HYBRIDS

- These are the result of breeding programs and selected for uniform growth, fruit production, and other desirable characteristics

## • GMO

- Genetically modified organisms that have been modified in a laboratory
  - ◆ Roundup ready corn
- Not necessarily a hybrid or cultivar

## • NON GMO

- Have not undergone genetic engineering in a lab
- Can include plant crosses and selection resulting in plants that have improved or unique qualities
  - ◆ x *Heucherella* is a cross between coral bells (*Heuchera*) and foam flower (*Tiarella*)

## • DAYS TO HARVEST OR MATURITY

- The average number of days from planting until you pick your first ripe tomato
- You may be harvesting sooner in a hot summer and later during a cooler growing season

## READING THE SEED PACKET

### • WHEN TO START INDOORS

- Plants that need more time than length of our season allows
- For earlier bloom or harvest in the garden

### • TIPS FOR SEED STARTING SUCCESS

### • DAMPING OFF

### • WINTER SOWING

### • WHEN TO PLANT IN THE GARDEN

- Based on frost dates and soil temperatures

### • LIGHT CONDITIONS

### • DAYS TO GERMINATE

- When seedlings appear

### • DAYS TO HARVEST / FLOWERING / MATURITY



## • HOW TO PLANT

- Depth
  - ◆ Usually twice the diameter of the seed deep Spacing
  - ◆ Recommended distance between seeds
- Thinning
  - ◆ Original spacing is usually closer than final spacing to allow for remaining plants to reach full size
  - ◆ Remove excess seedlings leaving enough room for remaining plants to reach full size
    - Some seedlings, like radish and beets, are edible
- Broadcast
  - ◆ Sprinkle seeds over the soil in a random fashion
- Furrows
  - ◆ Shallow trench to plant seeds in rows
- Hills
  - ◆ Create mounds to plant seeds
    - Often used for vining vegetables

## • WHEN TO HARVEST

- Range of days, varies with summer growing conditions
- Warmer weather usually means less time from seed or transplant to maturity

## CHECK PLANT TAGS FOR HELPFUL INFORMATION

### • PLANT NAME

- Common name
  - ◆ One plant can have many common names
    - Varies with region
    - Varies with experience - what you grew up knowing
- Botanical name
  - ◆ Important for ensuring you end up with the right plant
    - i.e. Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) - green leaves turn red in fall
      - \* Commonly called red maple is the maroon leafed Norway Maple
        - *Acer platanoides* 'Crimson King'
        - *Genus species* 'Cultivar'
        - *Gleditsia triacanthos inermis* - Thornless Honeylocust
        - *Genus species variety* or *Genus species* var. *variety*

### • HARDINESS

### • LIGHT REQUIREMENTS

### • PREFERRED SOIL CONDITIONS

### • MATURE SIZE

- That small plant can grow quite large
  - ◆ Plan for its mature size

### • SPACING

- Important for permanent plants that are difficult to move
  - ◆ Trees and shrubs
- Planting perennials closer together than recommended means you will be digging and dividing sooner
- Planting annual flowers and vegetables too close
  - ◆ Increases disease
  - ◆ Reduces flowering
  - ◆ Reduces productivity

## BUILD A HEALTHY FOUNDATION TO REDUCE ON-GOING MAINTENANCE

- Most gardeners start with less-than-ideal soil
- Majority of plants thrive in moist, well-drained soil
- Amend existing soil by incorporating several inches of compost or other organic matter into the top 8 to 12" of soil
- Work soil when moist, not wet
  - **TEST SOIL**
    - ◆ Testing available through most extension offices
      - University Website Directory
    - ◆ Results tell you what, if any, fertilizer or amendments are needed
    - ◆ No test
      - Incorporate low nitrogen, slow-release fertilizer, like Milorganite, when amending the soil or at planting and mid season, if necessary



- Other ways to build your own soil - check out these resources for more details

- **STRAW BALE GARDEN**

- ♦ Raised bed and planting medium in one
  - Condition bale to create compost to grow plants
  - Water often

- **LASAGNA GARDEN**

- ♦ Build raised bed from garden trimmings and compost
- ♦ Create bed when materials are available, then plant
- ♦ Or, stock pile materials, create bed and plant right away

- **HUGELKULTUR GARDEN**

- ♦ Uses branches and twigs as base for decades of benefits
- ♦ Lasagna garden on top of this layer

- **IMPROVE SOIL, COMPOST AND ROTATE IN ONE GARDEN - GREITEN TECHNIQUE**

- ♦ Rake existing soil into 4' wide raised beds with 2-3' wide paths between
- ♦ Compost garden trimmings in pathways
- ♦ End of season, rake soil over path creating next year's raised bed

## **CREATING A RAISED BED**

- **HEIGHT**

- Minimum 10" or higher for making maintenance easy

- **WIDTH**

- 4' or width that fits the space and is easy to reach

- **LENGTH**

- Available space
- Size of lumber used...

- **CONSIDER LINING WITH HARDWARE CLOTH TO DISCOURAGE GROUND SQUIRRELS AND CHIPMUNKS**

- **WHAT TO FILL IT WITH?**

- Blended topsoil
- Planting mix

- **MARK THE AREA WHERE RAISED BEDS WILL BE PLACED**

- Add 6" or more around the edge to create mowing strip

- **EDGE THE AREA TO SLOW INVASION OF WEEDS AND GRASS**

- **CUT EXISTING GRASS AND WEEDS SHORT**

- **BUILD RAISED BED**

- **COVER THE BOTTOM WITH NEWSPAPERS OR LAYER OF CARDBOARD**

- **FILL WITH PLANTING MIX**

## **CONTAINERS**

- Convenient for growing, tending, enjoying and using
- Containers with drainage holes for self-watering pots
  - Larger the container, more growing media
    - ♦ Holds water and nutrients longer
  - Type of material container is made from influences moisture holding ability
    - ♦ Terra cotta pots dry out more quickly than plastic or glazed
  - Fill with quality potting mix
- Fertilize containers
  - Low nitrogen, slow-release at planting and mid season if needed
  - Fast release more often according to label directions
- Watering containers
  - Check daily
  - Water thoroughly when top few inches are slightly moist
  - Reduce frequency
    - ♦ Plant Nannies
    - ♦ Wool Pellets

## **PLANTING TIPS**

- **SEEDS**

- Check the seed packet
  - ♦ Most seeds are planted 2 times the seed diameter deep
- Pelletized seeds and seed tapes make planting small seeds easier

- **TRANSPLANTS**

- Harden off
  - ♦ Gradually introduce to the outdoor conditions
    - Start with one hour of direct sun, increasing every day



- ♦ Stop fertilizing, allow soil to go a bit drier between waterings
  - ♦ Ready for the garden in 1 to 2 weeks
  - Planting in the garden
    - ♦ Loosen the roots
    - ♦ Dig hole twice as wide as the rootball
    - ♦ Same depth as growing in the container
      - Leggy tomatoes are the exception
        - \* Plant deeper to develop more roots
        - \* Or trench tomatoes to develop more roots
          - Dig a shallow trench, about 3 to 4" deep
          - Remove the lower leaves
          - Lay the plant on its side in the hole
          - Carefully bend the stem, so the remaining upper leaves are above the soil
          - Fill the trench with soil
          - Water
  - ♦ Proper spacing
    - Check the plant tag and provide space to reach mature size
    - Fill voids between perennials with annuals the first year or two
  - ♦ Annual flowers
    - Remove flowers to encourage roots and more compact, sturdier growth
    - Just can't do it...
      - \* Remove flowers on every other plant or every other row
      - \* The following week, do the remaining
  - ♦ Vegetables
    - Remove fruit and flowers on plants to plants focus energy on developing roots, not ripening the existing fruit
    - Sacrificing these means a bigger harvest this season
- **PLANTING SHRUBS**
- **PLANTING TREES**

## WATER

- New plantings often enough to keep soil moist around root zone and surrounding soil
- Once established, most plants need an inch of water per week
  - Adjust for weather
  - Provide 1" (or what is needed) once a week in heavy soils
  - Provide 1/2", twice a week, in fast drying soils
- **Consider soaker hoses or drip irrigation**
  - Applies water directly to the soil where it is needed
  - Easier for you - just water with a turn of the faucet

### **Contact Diggers Hotline or your local underground utility locating service BEFORE you start digging - It's a FREE service**

In Wisconsin file online at [diggershotline.com](http://diggershotline.com) or anywhere in the U.S., including Wisconsin, call 811 at least 3 business days before putting the first shovel in the ground. Once your request is received, Diggers Hotline (or your local locating service) contacts all the appropriate underground utilities. The utility's locators will mark the location of the underground utilities in the work area. Avoid digging near the marks to reduce the risk of damage, personal injury or even death.





## MULCHING

- Spreading a thin layer of organic matter over the soil surface
  - Shredded leaves
  - Evergreen needles
- Coarser the material, thicker the layer
  - Leaves - 1"
  - Woodchips - 3-4"
- Keep mulches several inches away from tree trunks, stems and plant crown
- Conserves moisture
  - You'll water less
- Suppresses weeds
  - Less to pull
- As mulch breaks down, it improves the soil
- Do not use weed barrier under organic mulches
  - Weed seeds blow in and root through mulch and fabric
  - Composted organic mulch never reaches soil and can block pores, preventing water and air from reaching soil below
  - As plants grow, weed barrier can girdle tree trunk and cause death
- Quick tips for applying mulch
  - Save pots as you plant
  - Once plants are in the garden, cover with pots and spread mulch
  - Or apply mulch to garden first, then push aside to plant
- Stone mulch provides aesthetic value, but does not improve the soil
  - Do use weed barrier under stone
    - ◆ Prevents stone from sinking into soil
  - Remove organic matter (leaves and such) that collects on stone mulch

## FERTILIZING

- Follow soil test results
- Incorporate slow-release fertilizer at planting
  - Releases small amounts of nutrients over a long period of time
  - Make second application mid season, if needed
- Fast release fertilizer every week or two according to label directions for annuals and containers
- Stop fertilizing perennials August 1<sup>st</sup>, so they can prepare for winter
  - Spreading a 1 to 2" layer of compost over soil every other year or two is often sufficient for perennials
- Trees and shrubs
  - Wait a year to fertilize new plantings
  - Established trees and shrubs often get enough nutrients from fertilizer applied to the planting beds where they are grown or surrounding lawn
  - Fertilizing trees

## GROOMING

- Deadheading
  - Remove faded flowers to promote more blooms or tidier appearance
  - Spike-type flowers like salvia
    - ◆ Remove faded flower back to side shoots or healthy leaves
  - Daylily, balloon flower
    - ◆ Remove individual flowers as they fade, then remove the flower spike
  - Coral bells and armeria
    - ◆ Cut flower stem back to rosette of leaves
- Soft pinch
  - ◆ Remove tip to encourage branching
- Hard pinch
  - ◆ Cut leggy stems back to above a set of healthy leaves
  - ◆ More compact, denser growth
- Pruning perennials for better growth and flowering

**MOST IMPORTANTLY - RELAX AND HAVE FUN!**





## **UPCOMING APPEARANCES & WEBINARS**

*Check often as more appearances and webinars continue to be added.*

### **April 1<sup>st</sup>**

REALTORS Home and Garden Show

[More Information](#)

### **April 5<sup>th</sup> Webinar**

*What's New - Discover New & Unique Plants!*

### **April 11<sup>th</sup>**

Southwest Indiana Master Gardener Association

[More Information](#)

### **April 18<sup>th</sup> Webinar**

*Growing a Bountiful Harvest Even When Time, Space & Budget are Limited*

### **April 20<sup>th</sup>**

SC Johnson Golden Rondelle Theater

[More Information](#)

### **April 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Pasquesi Home & Gardens

[More Information](#)

### **April 25<sup>th</sup>**

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park

[More Information](#)



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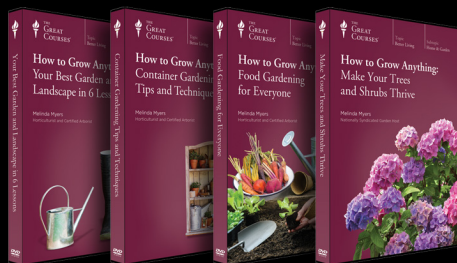
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## BOOKS

Midwest Gardener's Handbook

Small Space Gardening

Midwest Lawn Guides

Minnesota & Wisconsin Getting Started Garden Guide

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