

Special Report:

Gardening Tips from TheHouseholdHelper.com



Gardening to Relax

When you find a hobby that interest you it can be a way to relieve stress or to get away a little while from your troubles.

Hobbies can build self esteem and give you something that you can accomplish on your own and for yourself. Gardening is also considered a hobby for some.

There are several reasons why gardening can help you relax. Usually you feel better if you can separate yourself from a stressful situation and that can be accomplished by doing something that you like.

Gardening can build self confidence and it can raise self esteem. When you grow a garden you can feel satisfied knowing that you created something important and special.

Gardening can also get you out of the house in order to enjoy the fresh air which is very healthy.

Gardening can be done outdoors or indoors, depending on where you live and your physical limitations. Even those with disabilities can benefit from gardening in several ways.

Gardening can be easy to do and it may have a positive affect on someone who is normally depressed or sad. They may feel like they are unable to succeed in anything or low self esteem.

Growing a garden inside during the winter months is a great way to beat the winter time blues.

Healthy hands are the Gardener's Best Tools

Here are the major reasons why one should consider getting a pair of trusty gardening gloves:

Gloves protect your hands from blisters, thorns and cuts while doing rough work like digging or pruning in the garden. Investing in one or more pairs of quality gloves is a good decision.

Here are some tips on how to choose the pair that will suit you best:

1. Look for quality leather gloves with a cloth back; this will let the gloves breathe and keep your hands dry, cool and comfortable.
2. If mud bothers you, select rubber gloves with cotton lining.

3. When spraying pesticides or chemicals choose gloves that are made from neoprene. Gloves made from latex or any type of plastic may not offer the best protection.
4. When pruning roses, use gloves that reach up to the arms.
5. If you usually operate large garden machinery, buy gloves in brown instead of red as the latter may dye your hands.
6. Light cotton or even fingerless gloves may be useful for transplanting seedlings. They will allow more dexterity and so help to prevent the tiny roots from being crushed.
7. And of course, make sure that the gloves you buy actually fit your hands. If you have small hands, try the children's gardening section. there's nothing worse than trying to garden in gloves that are too big.

Your gloves must be comfortable as well as give protection to best serve your gardening needs.

In Search of the Best Gardening Tools

Different kinds of gardens require different kinds of garden tools. Hardware stores mostly cater for a wide range of tools, but there are shops that specialize in the more expensive kind of garden tool that shouts quality. Wherever you decide to shop, here are a few pointers to advise you.

Do you have small garden or a large one? A small garden will not require the same large equipment that would be of use in an extensive one. A ride-on mower is unnecessary if you only have a small strip of lawn. Another point to consider is who does most of the gardening? Some tools are too heavy for use by women.

When you buy secateurs make sure the blade always stays sharp to avoid damaging the plant. Look for models that have blades that can be sharpened or replaced, models with tension control and with sizes that best fit your hands. Secateurs usually cost around \$50 - \$130.

Hedge trimmers or shears are handy - but only if you have a hedge, or plan on growing one. Some hedge trimmers have curved blades to stop branches from sliding out when cut.

Forks are used for turning and aerating compost and breaking up lumps of soil. The cheaper ones are often not strong enough for heavy soil, so go for sturdiness instead of price. Forks usually cost around \$30 - \$100.

A shovel has a scoop blade and is best used to move around dirt and garden soil. A spade has a flat blade great for cutting edges, digging and dividing plants. The edge of a spade should be kept sharpened for clean and efficient cutting will cause the least amount of damage to plants. These are a basic garden necessity and usually cost from \$30 - \$50.

A pruning saw is used for pruning trees and larger shrubs, while secateurs are for plants like roses. Pruning saws have a narrow curved blade that fits between stems or branches and easily and cuts them as you pull the saw backwards. They are approximately \$27- \$55.

A chipping hoe is a handy tool for getting rid of small weeds. The Dutch or push-hoe is slightly more user-friendly as the action required to use it does not jar the neck and shoulder quite so much.

A rake is also a basic requirement for the garden. The strong rake with the flat head and sharp metal prongs is used for smoothing a garden bed and getting out the last of the bumps and weeds. The plastic rake is used to gather leaves and grass clippings only.

Gardening tools don't have to be expensive. Flea markets and garage sales can be excellent places to pick up great tool bargain.

It Starts With Your Garden Soil

Do you have a problem getting your garden to grow? Have you tried fertilizers and regular watering but your plants still come out looking sick and weak? Your problem may be improper soil. Often soils don't have the right texture or chemical properties for plants to grow well. The good news is: even though you can't replace the soil you have, there are things you can do to make it a better environment for your plants. Fixing your soil takes a few simple steps. Follow them and you'll be on your way to having a beautiful garden in no time.

The most common problem with soil is that it isn't the optimal texture. The best soil for growing a garden is loam. Loam holds appropriate amounts of water and allows enough aeration in the soil. Sandy soil doesn't allow proper draining or aeration. Clay soil gets very hard and can allow essential moisture to wash away without ever penetration into your plant's roots.

To test your soil, wet it slightly and take a ball of soil in your hand. If your soil is sandy, it won't form into a ball. If it is clay, it will form into a ball and not break apart easily. Both these problems can be fixed by mixing in a thin layer of compost into your soil with a gardening fork. For sandy soil, add fine particles of compost. Add coarser particles to loosen up a clay soil.

Another common problem with garden soil is an improper pH level. You can find kits to test your soil's pH at most garden supply stores. The pH of your garden should be between 6.0 and 7.5. Anything higher or lower is too acidic or too alkaline for proper growth. If your soil is too acidic, you can raise the pH level by adding various materials, including: crushed egg, clam or oyster shells, wood ashes, or calcitic lime. For an alkaline soil, pH can be lowered using sawdust, woodchips, peat moss, or pine needles.

If you take these steps, and then apply a little patience; your garden will be beautiful in no time.

Landscaping your Garden

Landscaping is usually a fairly big task, consuming much time and energy. But before you hire that professional, here are some tips that could save both time and money.

1. Spend some time thinking about exactly how you want the final design to be. You need to take account of the style and function of your landscape. Do you want to include an area for entertaining? A barbeque? Is there to be an area for children to play, a fishpond or a swimming pool? An idea of the plants you want to be there will also help. Focus on the area where you spend most of your time. That's a good place to start.
2. Think twice before hiring a pro. An independent designer might cost you hundreds of dollars when you may be able to access free plans on the internet or at a nursery. But if you have an awkward block such as very steep ground, a pro might give you the expertise to save costly mistakes.
3. The style of your home must be taken into account. If you have a rural cottage, formal gardens surrounding it will look out of place. Think also about your lifestyle. Do you want to spend hours caring for many beds of annuals or pruning beds of roses? If so, go ahead and plant them, but if you'd rather spend your free time at the beach, then go for an easy-care garden and landscape.

Here are the various landscape styles you can choose for your own garden:

- a. Formal. This style uses lots of straight lines and perfect geometrical shapes. Orderly arrangement of plants instead of random positioning is employed. Close arrangement and pruning is seen on many landscaped gardens with this style.
- b. Informal. This kind of landscaping works well with cosy cottages. Beds with curved edges instead of straight lines and random placement of plants suit this landscape style.
- c. English Garden. This style emphasizes the harmony between the house's architecture and the garden.

d. Formal/Informal Garden. This style often comes with a brick walkway that exudes formality. This walkway leads to the rear with a circle of plants. The arrangement of plants resembles the English garden style but it has no formal borders.

e. Oriental. It is often the kind of garden found in small backyards. It uses rocks, evergreens and water. A wide variety of plants create several interesting angles with this style.

f. Woodland. This landscaping suits a house that has a wooded backyard and sloping ground.

Why Mulch is Good News for Your Garden

Next time you walk or drive by a beautifully manicured garden, stop and take a look at the soil. Can you see it? Probably not. That's because people who care about gardening understand the immense value of mulch. Mulch not only makes your garden look great, it helps keep your plants healthy too.

Weeds are a gardener's worst enemy. They're not only unsightly; they also compete with your plants for water and vital nutrients. We all know what a pain it is to pull them, but most people feel uncomfortable using chemicals to get rid of them. Mulching can stop weeds before they even start growing. Using mulch covers up the areas around your plant so they don't get as much sunlight. Lack of sunlight means weed seed can't germinate and grow.

Mulching also reduces the amount of watering you have to do. Most of us have seen bare spots on someone's lawn. They generally look caked and dry. When it rains, water just rolls off of them instead of soaking in. Putting mulch on top keeps the water from evaporating out of the soil. This means your plants not only have more water, but they also have a more consistent source of water, so they get less stressed.

Another benefit of mulch is that it blocks the soil from receiving as much sunlight. This keeps the temperature from getting too high, and makes the soil temperature more consistent. This will prevent the roots of your plants from getting stressed; allowing them to grow healthy and strong.

Mulching also helps protect your plants from the soil. This may not seem like a benefit, but many plant diseases are carried in the soil. If the soil gets on the leaves, the disease can spread to your plant. This is also important if you grow certain vegetables. Mulch keeps them clean, dry, and healthy by keeping them away from dirt.

So go out and get some mulch today. You can use yard clippings, tree bark, compost, or pretty much any organic material. And since it's organic, it helps improve the soil after it breaks down. For warm weather plants, you can also use shredded black plastic to provide better heating for the soil.

Six Ticks For Organic Gardening

Organic gardening is the way of growing vegetables and fruits with the use of things only found in nature.

Why would one want to indulge in organic gardening?

1. One can easily make compost from garden and kitchen waste. Though this is a bit more time-consuming than buying prepared chemical pesticides and fertilizers, it certainly helps to put garbage to good use and so saves the environment.

2. Organic farming does not use chemicals that may have an adverse affect on your health. This is especially important when growing vegetables. Chemical companies tell us that the chemicals we use are safe if used according to direction, but research shows that even tiny amounts of poisons absorbed through the skin can cause such things as cancer, especially in children.

On the average, a child ingests four to five times more cancer-causing pesticides from foods than an adult. This can lead to various diseases later on in the child's life. With organic gardening, these incidents are lessened.

Remember, pesticides contain toxins that have only one purpose - to kill living things.

3. Less harm to the environment. Poisons are often washed into our waterways, causing death to the native fish and polluting their habitat.

4. Organic farming practices help prevent the loss of topsoil through erosion. The Soil Conservation Service says that an estimated 30 - 32 billion tons of soil erodes from United States farmlands every year.

4. Cost savings. One does not need to buy costly chemical fertilizers and pesticides with organic gardening. Many organic recipes for the control of pest and disease come straight from the kitchen cupboard. Sometimes other plants can be grown as companions to the main crop. An example of this is the marigold, which helps to repel aphids from vegetables.

Mixing 1 tablespoon of liquid dishwashing soap and 1 cup of cooking oil can make a cheap garden pest spray. Put 3 tablespoons of this mixture in 1 quart of water and spray on plants.

5. A simple mulch of pine needles will help to suppress the growth of weeds as well as keeping the moisture in.

6. Organic gardening practices help to keep the environment safe for future generations.

Choosing the Best Plants for your Garden

Many times we buy plants on impulse then find there is nowhere in the garden that really suits them. Before buying plants carefully examine your garden to see how much sun and shade it gets, whether the soil is well drained or waterlogged and whether your aspect is sheltered or windswept. You'll then be equipped to go and buy the best plants for your situation; shade-loving plants for the sheltered areas, sun-lovers for the warm spots, drought-resistant plants for the parched areas which may be either sunny or shaded, and swamp plants for the poorly-drained parts.

But wait! Test your soil first, to determine the pH level of your soil and what kind of nutrients you need to add, if any. Is the soil acid or alkaline? Most plants prefer soil that is slightly acidic, but there are some that must have alkaline soil to grow. You can alter the soil's pH level, but it's much easier to simply plant for the soil you have.

Now you are ready to plant. Well - almost. Will you plant in groups or singly? If you buy 'one of everything' your garden may seem rather spotty. Group plantings are organised, harmonious and you can vary the color for interest.

Before planting out, place your chosen plants around the garden bed in their pots to see how they will look. Re-arrange them until you are satisfied. Grouping plants in sets of threes or fives usually looks better than planting in groups of even numbers. Be sure that you have an interesting combination of colors and textures of plants. Tall plants should go to the back, or the centre if your garden will be viewed equally from all sides. Try to keep your plants away from trees. The roots of trees are fiercely competitive and will steal all the nutrients and moisture meant for your flowers.

The right color scheme is one way to maintain the harmony in your garden. Imagine the color of the flowers when they are in bloom. Some colors may clash with others, but can still be planted side-by-side if they have a different blooming season. Foliage color is also important. Many flower plants have silver, grey or purplish foliage that is just as attractive as the flower. This means that they are still attractive well past the blooming season and so have added value.

Care of the Flower Garden

Knowing how to care for your flower garden can make a big difference in the look and over-all health of your plants. Here are some simple hints to make your garden bloom with health

1. The essentials must always be given major consideration.

Your flower garden must have an adequate supply of water, sunlight, and fertile soil. Any lack of these basic necessities will greatly affect the health of plants. Water the flower garden more frequently during dry spells.

When planting bulbs, make sure they go at the correct depth. When planting out shrubs and perennials, make sure that you don't heap soil or mulch up around the stem. If you do, water will drain off instead of sinking in, and the stem could develop rot through overheating.

2. Mix and match perennials with annuals.

Perennial flower bulbs need not to be replanted since they grow and bloom for several years while annuals grow and bloom for only one season. Mixing a few perennials with annuals ensures that you will always have blooms coming on.

3. Deadhead to encourage more blossoms.

Deadheading is simply snipping off the flower head after it wilts. This will make the plant produce more flowers. Just make sure that you don't discard the deadhead on the garden or mildew and other plant disease will attack your plants.

4. Know the good from the bad bugs.

Most garden insects do more good than harm. Butterflies, beetles and bees are known pollinators. They fertilize plants through unintentional transfer of pollen from one plant to another. 80% of flowering plants rely on insects for survival.

Sowbugs and dung beetles together with fungi, bacteria and other microorganisms are necessary to help in the decomposition of dead plant material, thus enriching the soil and making more nutrients available to growing plants.

Other insects like lacewings and dragonflies are natural predators of those insects that do the real damage, like aphids.

An occasional application of liquid fertilizer when plants are flowering will keep them blooming for longer.

Always prune any dead or damaged branches. Fuchsias are particularly prone to snapping when you brush against them. The broken branch can be potted up to give you a new plant, so it won't be wasted.

Tips for Controlling Garden Weeds

Many kids have household chores: taking out the trash, dusting, and other simple projects. When I was a kid, my mom would put me to work pulling weeds in the garden. Why weed pulling? Simple: she didn't want to do it. Getting rid of weeds can be painful and time consuming. There are many chemical products on the market today, but they

can be hazardous and many of them simply don't work. Here are a few other options to minimize the amount of back-break weed pulling you'll have to do this year.

If you're just starting a garden, or if you only grow annual plants, you can simply till the weeds under and into the soil. If you have perennial weeds that keep popping, kill them once and for all using solarization. First, pull or till under all the current weeds. Then, add a black plastic sheet over top of your soil. This will cause heat up the soil in your garden, killing any seeds that may be hiding under the surface. The disadvantage of this method is that it may kill beneficial bacteria as well. It also can't be used if you have perennial plants in your garden because it will damage the root structure.

If you have perennials and don't want to tear up your entire garden, keep weeds away by adding mulch. Mulch keeps sunlight from reaching the soil; which prevents weed seeds from germinating. You will have to get rid of weeds to start with, but it will control prevent them from coming back. As an added benefit, mulch helps keeps your soil moist and moderates the temperature, which improves the health of your plants. You can use yard clippings, tree bark, or most organic materials to mulch your garden.

Whatever method you use, it's likely you'll still have to pull a few weeds, but remember that you can always get the kids to help out!

Container Gardening Tips

Container gardens can create a natural sanctuary in a busy city street, along rooftops or on balconies. You can easily accentuate the welcoming look of a deck or patio with colourful pots of annuals, or fill your window boxes with beautiful shrub roses or any number of small perennials. Whether you arrange your pots in a group for a massed effect or highlight a smaller space with a single specimen, you'll be delighted with this simple way to create a garden.

Container gardening enables you to easily vary your color scheme, and as each plant finishes flowering, it can be replaced with another. Whether you choose to harmonize or contrast your colors, make sure there is variety in the height of each plant. Think also of the shape and texture of the leaves. Tall strap-like leaves will give a good vertical background to low-growing, wide-leaved plants. Choose plants with a long flowering season, or have others of a different type ready to replace them as they finish blooming.

Experiment with creative containers. You might have an old porcelain bowl or copper urn you can use, or perhaps you'd rather make something really modern with timber or tiles. If you decide to buy your containers ready-made, terracotta pots look wonderful, but tend to absorb water. You don't want your plants to dry out, so paint the interior of these pots with a special sealer available from hardware stores.

Cheaper plastic pots can also be painted on the outside with water-based paints for good effect. When purchasing pots, don't forget to buy matching saucers to catch the drips. This will save cement floors getting stained, or timber floors rotting.

Always use a good quality potting mix in your containers. This will ensure the best performance possible from your plants.

If you have steps leading up to your front door, an attractive pot plant on each one will delight your visitors. Indoors, pots of plants or flowers help to create a cosy and welcoming atmosphere.

Decide ahead of time where you want your pots to be positioned, then buy plants that suit the situation. There is no point buying sun lovers for a shady position, for they will not do well. Some plants also have really large roots, so they are best kept for the open garden.

If you have plenty of space at your front door, a group of potted plants off to one side will be more visually appealing than two similar plants placed each side. Unless they are spectacular, they will look rather boring. Group the pots in odd numbers rather than even, and vary the height and type. To tie the group together, add large rocks that are similar in appearance and just slightly different in size. Three or five pots of the same type and color, but in different sizes also looks affective.

With a creative mind and some determination, you will soon have a container garden that will be the envy of friends and strangers alike.

Vegetable Gardening Tips

With the costs of living rising all the time, it may be possible to save money and increase your family's health at the same time by growing vegetables in your backyard.

It's a good idea to choose your favorite vegetables to grow and plan beds for early, middle of the season and late varieties.

Most vegetables require at least 6 hours of sunlight per day, some need 8. Some quick growers like lettuce and radish can be grown between the rows of plants that take longer to mature, like beet or corn, thus making full use of the area available.

Throughout dry periods, vegetable gardens need extra watering. Most vegetables benefit from an inch or more of water each week, especially when they are fruiting.

During the growing season watch for insect pests. If you discover a bug problem early it will be much easier, but be careful to not use pesticides once the vegetable are close to being picked unless it becomes an absolute necessity. Organic gardening is one healthy and environment-friendly option. Once you have reaped your crop, put the vegetable waste into your compost pile so that it can be recycled for next spring.

It is important to protect your vegetable garden from wild animals looking for a tasty treat. Make sure your garden is surrounded by a fence that will keep out dogs, rabbits, and other animals. The harm done by wandering animals during one season can equal

the cost of a fence. A fence also can serve as a frame for peas, beans, tomatoes, and other crops that need support.

Protection is needed in order for your vegetable garden to yield a bountiful harvest. Hard work will pay dividends if necessary precautions have been made.

Safe Pest Control Tips

Pest control must be done with utmost consideration to safety; safety in terms of the plants, animals and humans. This holds especially true for those with vegetable and organic gardens.

The main purpose of growing vegetables organically will be defeated if they become tainted with pest control chemicals.

Here are a few long-term maintenance tips to make pest control less damaging and more environmentally friendly.

1. Use the physical pest control process.

This may be accomplished through picking grubs off by hand, creating barriers and traps and plugging holes. Snails can be found hiding in damp places under rocks and towards the base of those plants with straplike foliage.

2. Apply biological pest control.

Encourage predatory insects such as green lacewings and dragonflies to feed on aphids and other pests that attack your plants. You can do this by placing a shallow bowl of water in the garden. Dragonflies especially will hover around water. Bacterial insecticides such as *B. thuringiensis* could also be used against caterpillars.

3. Only as a last resort should we turn to chemical pest control.

Organic pest control methods can be successful and the ingredients for many of the recipes can be found in the kitchen cupboards. If chemical sprays are really necessary, try and find the least-toxic. These include insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, dehydrating dusts, etc.

4. Consider the use of safer pest control substitutes.

Recipes for alternative pest control include the following:

Against Green Aphids and Mites - Mix 1 tablespoon of liquid soap and a cup of vegetable oil. Dilute a teaspoon of this solution in a cup of water and spray on aphids and mites.

Against Cockroaches - Dusts of boric acid can be applied to cracks or entry points of these insects. Bay leaves on pantry shelves could also help in warding off these critters.

Make sure that the chemicals you use are made specifically for the insects you are targeting.

Encouraging Wildlife in Your Garden

While choosing the right plants and flowers for your garden is important for making it look beautiful, the best gardens also incorporate local wildlife for that special touch. Here are a few tips to help make your garden more attractive to your animal neighbors.

Most living creatures need a steady supply of water to survive. While animals may stop by your yard, they're going to keep on moving if they don't find fresh water available. You can supply this water by installing a pond, adding a bird bath, or even putting out a bucket to collect rain water.

When I go into my mother's back yard, I feel like Snow White. There are squirrels, birds, rabbits, and chipmunks everywhere you look. She doesn't have a bird bath. She doesn't provide animals with shelter. She doesn't even have a garden. All she does is feed them. Especially in the winter, animals will go where the food is. If you put food out regularly, you should eventually have a host of wildlife. Having readily available food will also help deter your yard animals from eating items in your garden. Just be careful, eventually you will get predators in your yard, including cats and even birds of prey.

Along with food and water, animals also require shelter to live. You can attract birds to your garden by putting in houses and supplying them with nesting material. You should also consider shelter for other animals, such as insects and small rodents. Leaving small areas of your garden unmanicured, or putting leaves around will provide these smaller (but not less important) animals a place to stay.

While food, water and shelter are the most important factors for attracting wildlife, there are a few other steps you can take. To attract specific insects, you should put certain plants in your garden. If you're unsure, remember that species natural to your area will probably attract most local wildlife. You should also remember to keep your soil healthy and looses so insects can feel welcome.

By taking a few small steps, you can help your garden attract lots of local wildlife. Just remember that animals are usually creatures of habit and it will take a while for them to change.

Gardening With Your Kids

Apparently, we can see how nature is treated these days. It is a sad thing to know that people do not pay attention so much anymore to the environmental problems. What can we do about this? It's as simple as starting with the children. It is good to see the children's involvement with environment-friendly activities. One such nature-loving activity that children could easily get their hands on is gardening. Why should you consider gardening for your children?

Here are the benefits that gardening could easily provide the children with:

1. Science

In planting, children are indirectly taught the wonders of science like the plant's life cycle and how human's intervention can break or make the environment. They can have a first hand experience on the miracle of life through a seed. This would definitely be a new and enjoyable experience for the kids.

2. Life

Watching a seed grow into a tree is just as wondrous as the conception to birth and growth of a child. In time, kids will learn to love their plants and appreciate the life in them. Gardening could actually help simulate how life should be treated -- it should be with care. The necessities to live will be emphasized to kids with the help of gardening - water, sunlight, air, soil. Those necessities could easily be corresponded to human necessities, i.e., water, shelter, air, food. By simply weeding out, one could educate how bad influences should be avoided to be able to live life smoothly.

3. Relaxation

Studies show that gardening can reduce stress because of its calming effect. This is applicable to any age group. More so, it stimulates all the five senses. Believe it or not, gardening may be used as therapy to children who have been abused or those who are members of broken homes. It helps build one's self-esteem.

4. Quality Time with the Family

You can forget about your stressful work life for a while be soothed by the lovely ambience in the garden. You can play and spend quality time with your children. You can talk while watering the plants or you can work quietly beside each other. The bottom line is, always do what you have to do, together with your kids. You might discover a lot of new things about your child while mingling with them in your garden.

Let kids become aware of their environment's needs. And one way to jumpstart that environmental education may be through gardening. It's hitting two birds with one stone -- teach them to respect life while you bond with them.