



Have a Plan Before Shopping for Plants

We all love to shop for plants in the spring. We've been pent up all winter dreaming over beautiful pictures in gardening books and magazines and drooling over descriptions in plant catalogs.

The first warm days of spring find you at your local garden center ready to satisfy that plant-purchase yearning. All the flowers look so pretty, they're almost begging you to take them home. You're not sure where you'll plant them but you know you can't leave them behind, so you buy just one of a few different varieties.

When those pretty flowers disappear into your perennial border, you realize that your garden has become a jumble of 'one of each'. When creating a beautiful garden, a little discipline is necessary. Whether you are contemplating a new project, or would like to bring order into your current landscape, these tips will help you organize and avoid costly mistakes.



Define your tastes and goals.

Garden books are an excellent source of inspiration, but they are not always realistic to try to duplicate. Instead, take advantage of local garden walks that occur throughout the summer and visit public gardens and arboretums where you will see mature specimens of plants that grow in our area.

There are many fine perennials that require two or more seasons to look their best like Baptisia, gas plant and turtlehead. Seeing plants like these in a mature state may open up a whole new palette of plants for you.

Of course, you visit your local garden center in spring, but you should also drop in when your garden is at its weakest. August and September visits will open a whole new world of beautiful plants. Late summer or fall bloomers are a great source of color in your border.

Assess your yard.

Take note of areas baked in sunshine or darkened with shade. Notice how water moves through your property. This information will allow you to choose appropriate plants that prefer moist or dry conditions, sunlight or shadow.

Examine the health and condition of existing plants. Trees, shrubs and other plants can outlive their usefulness or, if you're like me, you've made some inappropriate choices or planted some in the wrong spots.

Don't live with bad choices. Use pruners, a shovel, or even a chain saw to get your landscape on the right track.

Develop your garden over time.

With goals and a vision in mind you can start developing your garden. Take advantage of knowledgeable garden center professionals to prepare the soil properly and to place trees and shrubs. It is important to set the bones of your garden with care.

Locate the border or bed where you can enjoy it and easily tend to it. Consider the views from inside your home. Place garden vignettes where you'll be able to see them without venturing outside. Follow these design tips and you will be well on your way to a lovely garden:

- Use color in context. Consider the color of retaining walls, paving, fencing, and statuary.
- Plant form (or shape) and leaf texture are often lasting components of good design. Flowers are fun, but fleeting. Shape and texture endure. The fuzzy leaves of lamb's ear or the succulent leaves of sedum add interest even when the plant is not blooming.
- Think about other plant characteristics like the draping effect of some campanulas, the leaf texture of yarrows, and the seedpods of pasque flower or baptisias.
- Plants that 'die with dignity' are valuable assets to the border. They save time on maintenance.
- Use contrasting flower shapes and colors to make the garden more interesting.
- Repeat plants in the border to achieve consistency and to avoid the look of clutter.
- Anchor the garden with masses of proven perennials, but leave room for the occasional impulse purchase. Gardening should be fun after all!

Few of us have room for everything we want. If we choose plants according to an overall plan, our gardens will be a source of joy for many years to come.



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