

GREEN FINGERS

Gardening For Everyone

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Introduction

Your search ends here for that perfect garden, because we have put together this ebook on every possible gardening topic. Want to know about your soil? Read on. Looking for time saving gardening tips? Read on. Want updates on new gardening trends? Experimenting with flowers? We can go on indefinitely, but you get the drift, don't you? So, well, read on...

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1. All About Annuals

They may have a short lifespan, but annuals do pack a dynamite of rewards for any gardener who decides to grow the same. Annuals are named as such because they only produce blooms once in their life cycle, right before they wither. Does this make them worth growing? Well, it would depend on the type of annuals you would choose and how you plan to use them for your garden, but in general, annuals do make great investments for the passionate gardener hoping to create a unique and noteworthy effect.

Most annuals are known for their fantastically beautiful blooms, and their amazingly delightful fragrance that heralds the prime of their lifespan. Some of them even produce fabulous foliage that can serve as the centerpiece for any garden.

From Seeds To Annuals:

There has always been a debate about getting annuals as seeds or buying them as pre-started seedlings. The former should always be preferred. Pre-started seedlings are quite limiting. Most garden shops don't offer a full range of choices compared to annual seeds that you could procure from the same sources. More importantly, buying seeds would give you the option to plant them indoors, in containers mostly, and transplanting them into the garden later on when the season would allow it. Pre-started seedlings cannot afford this luxury, as these young sprouts are more delicate with the same. Also, annuals from seeds would give you the leeway to prepare for the right season when you could plant them for optimal growth. Pre-started seedlings are pretty much already set, and they won't give you the flexibility to choose when to grow them.

Outdoor Considerations:

Here are some things you need to know when you're planning to grow annuals outdoors:

- *Annuals require well-drained soil with a pH level between 6.3 and 6.7.*
- *Annuals like organic enhancers.* Fertilizers are a must to bring out the best from your annuals. They only grow once, so might as well ensure that they would produce the best results. Slow release fertilizers are the best to use for annuals, since they are easier to facilitate.
- *You have to space your seeds correctly.* Placing them too close together would just make them compete for the necessary nutrients for their growth. Annuals don't like crowding. They need some room to fully mature. But the space between the seeds should not be far apart, especially when you want to make your annuals the focal point of your garden.

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- *Avoid overhead watering.* Some annuals would get destroyed because of this, since they may have more delicate bodies compared to other flowers.

Aesthetic Annuals:

You might also want to consider climbing annuals if the surroundings would allow the same. Windows, for example, can greatly benefit from climbing annuals, as these types of flowers would give your windows and your house a magnificent effect that would most certainly attract attention. Fences, trellises and other supports would also be given new life with these climbing annuals.

Also, shady spots can likewise greatly benefit from the vibrant colors that annuals can bring. If a tree or a post causes a dark spot on any part of your garden, simply plant a row of annuals on the said area, and watch the shades disappear with the radiant colors the annuals would produce come their full bloom.

Annuals are great complements, not only for your garden but for your house as well. Use them properly, and you'll realize that annuals are wonderful and rewarding investments for the total beauty of your household.

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2. The Many Benefits Of Gardening

You see gardens in many homes, in many recreational places, and even in many working environments. They are used to please the eyes and provide a temporary respite to the usually exhaustive demands of everyday life. Somehow, a touch of green is an invigorating sight for weary souls looking for a refreshing experience. Aside from the pleasures a garden can provide for people who get to see the same, the act of creating, and maintaining, a garden is a rewarding experience in itself.

Why are a lot of people, regardless of gender, age, creed, religion and beliefs, fascinated with the art of gardening? Perhaps, it's because of the many benefits that can be derived from the same. Let's take a look at ten fantastic advantages that can be enjoyed from putting a green spin in our lives.

- *Gardening enriches our aesthetic sensibilities.* The myriad colors that the plants would give their surroundings are indeed a sight to behold. Not only that, plants do add a level of dynamism to any environment, and if executed well, they would also add a touch of class to any place that would host them.
- *Gardening gives us a sense of fulfillment.* It's not easy to work with plants. You must have what many people call as a green thumb to be able to realize their potentials. This is a challenge in itself, and conquering the same would give us a sense of gratification and accomplishment that is quite difficult to surpass.
- *Gardening can do wonders for our gastronomic and taste hungry needs.* Plants can embellish and complement meals, as a variety of fruits and vegetables would be readily available for the diligent gardener. Hybrid vegetables, if such are pursued, do make great meals as well.
- *Gardening allows us to practice our landscaping skills.* Landscaping would help us develop our sense of design. It will also instill in us an aesthetic appreciation, as well as give us a source of pride since a beautiful garden would truly create a buzz amongst our guests.
- *Many people believe that plants bring the owners good fortunes.* In fact, a lot of people talk to their plants, and some even sing to them, hoping for the very same result.
- *Gardening would give us something to look forward to everyday.* Have the flowers bloomed? Have the plants born fruit? Have the leaves fallen to signify the start of autumn? These may seem like simple things, but they are great causes of joy for many gardeners the world over.

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- *Some flowers can bring wonderful fragrances that would most certainly brighten up our days.* Some flowers even have therapeutic effects that greatly improve our health so that we could make the most out of life.
- *Gardening can help boost any property's value.* Statistics show that houses with gardens sell better than houses without any landscaped area of green to speak of. Because of the aesthetic appeal that gardening can bring, the desirability of any property blessed with the same would experience a significant boost in worth.
- *A garden can be the heart of something bigger, if we would allow our imagination to play.* Add a bird tower, and it could become a good environment for a natural aviary. A garden can also be the centerpiece for a man made lagoon. The limit, really, is your imagination. A garden can become so much bigger than just an area of green.
- *Gardening can help you earn some extra money.* Others have even made this their profession. Develop your landscaping skills, and you could sell such a service to other people. Grow many flowers and you could easily arrange them into bouquets which you could sell to several interested parties. Harvest enough fruits and vegetables and you could supply retail stores with the same.

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3. Essential Gardening Tools You Cannot Live Without

Every artist, every professional, and every hobbyist would need some tools by which they could complete their tasks. Gardeners are no different. In fact, more than any other position, gardeners need the right tools to be able to grow a bountiful crop. Their selection of tools is more delicate than other situations, as these implements can make or break the gardening campaign. Your selection of tools is vital for the success of your garden, so you have to choose the right ones to give your foray in the wonderful world of gardening a great start.

So, what are the essential tools that you would need to reap some success with your gardening experience? Here is a list of what equipment you should invest on to make the most out of your garden.

- *There are many varieties of garden tools.* Let's start with the basics. You would need hand tools, of course, for some manual fun. Shovels, forks, pliers, and cutters are instruments that you could not do without. They are needed from working the soil, digging for seed holes, and planting your seedlings.
- *Then there are the bigger tools that require more power and dexterity.* Edgers would help you maintain the comfort area of each sprout, and preserve the pristine borders of the garden. Hand cultivators would help you maintain the porosity of the soil. Spading forks also serve the same purpose. Hoes and long handled spades would help you dig some holes and level some areas for a garden with a more beautiful landscape. A pick mattock would help you get rid of unsightly and unworkable rocks and big stones. A rake would help you clean the garden so that you would rid the same of dried leaves and other foreign objects. A hard toothed rake would also help you work the soil for maximum benefits.
- *Wheeled equipment would make life easier for you.* A lawn spreader would help you level the grass area of your garden. A wheelbarrow would help you transport items, garbage, soil, rocks and other things with ease.
- *Then we have the power tools.* Though a lawn spreader is great, it would take some muscles to work your lawn with this manual tool. A lawnmower is always recommended. Just ride the baby and you're all set to go. Also, a roto-tiller would also help you renovate your lawn with ease. Imagine having to till a 50 by 50 feet garden with a mere spade. Hard work, right? But with a roto-tiller, you'd be able to work the lawn in a matter of minutes. Power tools are great investments for serious gardeners, as well as those who have to maintain big gardens. They could make life more convenient for you, and they could also simplify what would otherwise be difficult gardening tasks.

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- *Indeed, garden tools need serious resources.* No worthwhile investment comes cheap. If you feel that investing on essential garden tools is quite impractical considering your budget and the needs dictated by the size and type of your garden, you could consider renting them when maintenance season arrives. There is no doubt that gardening tools would help you achieve the garden of your dreams, but budgetary constraints should not impede the same. Do consider renting whenever appropriate.

Garden tools are your partners in building and maintaining a beautiful garden. More often than not, garden tools are designed to improve your soil. And your soil, as we all know, is the heart of every gardening endeavor. A healthy soil would facilitate the growth of healthy plants, after all.

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4. New Trends In Gardening

Gardening is an ages-old art form. Since the dawn of civilization, man and plants have worked together to create beautiful landscapes, feed an entire society, help convey messages of warmth and love, pave the way for medical advancements, and help preserve ecological balance for a more productive world. Throughout the centuries, gardening has developed a lot, especially with its aesthetic aspects. Today, gardening is resorted to so that properties may enjoy that touch of green which would provide a refreshing respite from the relatively monotonous colors of everyday life.

But gardening continues to evolve. Today, people continue to find new ways to enjoy this process which has become a passion. Indeed, there are many kinds of gardening that have been introduced throughout the years to make the most out of this “adventure.”

So what are the most popular gardening methods in this day and age? Here are six new trends in gardening which are worth your time and attention.

- *Emphasis on colors.* Green is slowly becoming more and more passé for many veteran gardeners. Today, a lot of people are experimenting on techniques that would give birth to a garden bursting with colors. Flowers, hybrids and annuals have become popular sprouts for a lot of them, as they are able to provide the cacophony of tones and hues that would elevate any garden to the next level of aesthetic prominence.
- *Emphasis on fragrance.* Gardens don't have to be mere pleasures for the eyes. They could also provide a total sensory experience. Fragrant gardens are the rave these days. More and more people are realizing the therapeutic benefits of terrific aroma from a garden rich with blooms. Not only that, but a garden that can be designed as such would most certainly win the praises of the guests who would get to experience such an area of the house first hand. Surely, achieving this would bring about a sense of fulfillment on the part of the gardener, one which is quite difficult to match.
- *Container gardening.* Previous belief is that gardening can only be afforded by people with a big empty space of soil in their lots. This isn't the case anymore. Container gardening is becoming more and more popular, especially for city folks. All you need is a small container that could house some soil. The amount of soil should be enough to sustain the healthy growth of a particular plant. Once you have that, you're all set to go. You won't have to be limited by space constraints anymore to enjoy the pleasures of gardening.
- *Focus on Foliage.* Before, people placed emphasis on the types of plants they wish to grow. Things aren't that easy anymore, as today, gardeners are

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considering the foliage of their choice of plants, meaning, much attention is being given to their texture, shape and pattern. A great garden is one which would be able to harmonize all these elements into one congruent and aesthetic whole.

- *Plants that grow all year round.* Gone are the days when the choice of plants to grow is limited by the prevailing season. These days, people can apply a variety of techniques to help plants endure the harshest of weathers and climates. The result? A garden that preserves its beauty despite the changing seasons.
- *Pre-grown plants.* For some people, the best way to enjoy gardening is to skip the tedious processes involved with the same. A pre-grown plant is the way to go for this select group of enthusiasts. All they have to do is to choose already grown plants, and place the same in their garden or a container. Just like that, they would have an instant garden that could easily suit their tastes.

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5. Five Essential Factors Vital For Healthy Plant Growth

Much like how a doctor shouldn't treat a patient without possessing knowledge about medicine, a gardener cannot cultivate some plants without any knowledge about their needs. Indeed, plant needs are the first things that any would-be gardener should know about. Gardening, after all, is about the proper care of plants. Without knowing the factors that would contribute to the optimal health of these plants, any gardening endeavor would be pointless.

Hence, it is essential that a gardener should first study the conditions that would ensure the good health and proper growth of plants before he could try his hands on gardening. In this article, we are going to discuss the five important factors that are vital for plants you want to grow. Study them well, as the art of gardening would revolve around these things, and perfecting each one is the key to success as well as a bountiful harvest or a cacophony of beautiful blooms.

- *Moisture.* Moisture is critical for plant life. Moisture helps regulate temperature, and it also facilitates the distribution of much needed nutrients to the plants. Moisture can be controlled by positive acts like watering, sprinkling, and the likes, or by environmental forces like the weather, the climate as well as the location of the plants.
- *Air.* More specifically, air that is composed of oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide. Oxygen comes in abundance. In fact, plants produce more oxygen than they could use (hence their importance for the global ecosystem). The problem that is usually encountered is the supply of carbon dioxide, especially for plants housed in closed environments, like greenhouses or container gardens.
- *Nutrients.* Plants need basic chemical elements for their sustenance. These include nitrogen, potash and phosphorous. From air and water, plants can derive carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. Soil helps retain some of these. But these nutrients aren't taken in just like that. There are some processes that must take place before they could be produced. Photosynthesis is probably the most popular of them, and to facilitate an effective process, a balance of forces is needed. Also, six essential macro-nutrients can be derived from the soil. These are phosphorous, nitrogen, magnesium, potassium, sulfur and calcium.
- *Temperature.* Temperature is vital for plants. Different plants require different degrees of temperature. Some are more resistant against extreme degrees. Others are quite delicate when it comes to the heat or coldness of their surroundings. Undesirable temperature can stunt the growth of plants, as the normal processes that are essential for their development would be

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unduly curtailed.

- *Light.* When we talk about light for plants, we're dealing with both its quantity and quality. Quantity refers to the amount of sunlight that plants receive on a daily basis. Some require at least 8 hours of direct sunlight. Some require less. An amount that exceeds what the plants can take can wither the leaves and lead to the death of the plants. Quality refers to the intensity of the light to which the plants are exposed. It also pertains to the color of the light source, which can have important effects for certain plant types. Light quantity and quality varies with the changing seasons, hence, it is a must that you should study the plants you're planning to grow and find the appropriate schedule when you could sow them.

From the foregoing, you could immediately conclude that your selection of plants and your idea for a garden should be determined by considering all the factors that affect plant growth. So before you try your hands at gardening, try to study these factors first, and know them by heart if necessary. They would ensure a healthy and rewarding crop for you and your family and friends to enjoy.

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6. Seven Tips On Color For Your Garden

These days, more and more gardeners are being driven by colors rather than plant types. They wish to achieve a certain color scheme for their gardens, and this dictates their choice of plants. Flowers are the plants of choice for these gardeners, and their blooms are capable of producing a radiant effect and an explosion of tones and hues that would give life to any garden.

But dealing with colors is always a delicate matter. Deal with colors carelessly and you might just end up with a garden that is riddled with discord. If you want to achieve maximum effects for your garden, you need to plan the colors you want to attain beforehand. Below, you could find seven superb tips on how to deal with colors for your garden properly. Try to study them well and you'll be able to come up with a garden that is bursting with the most pleasant color scheme possible.

- *When planning your garden, try to picture it as a painting.* This would require you to pay close attention to the depth or softness of the colors you want to use. Also, you'd have to determine which among the colors you have chosen would dominate your imagined palette, and which colors would complement the same. You would need some bridging colors, some enhancing colors, and some complementary colors that won't take anything away from the primary colors you have in mind.
- *Sometimes, the location of the garden and the existing landscape also determines our choice of colors, and consequently, our choice of flowers.* Shaded areas, for example, would benefit greatly from a flowerbed of annuals, since these types of flowers produce lighter colors like pink, white and blue. Surely, those darker areas would improve with the addition of such colors.
- *The surroundings of the garden should also help you determine your choice of colors.* Dark blue flowers, for example, would just lose their focus when placed in the backdrop of a darkly painted wall. Bright red flowers would get lost when presented in the backdrop of a similarly colored facade. Contrast is the key. If you want your flowers, and the color scheme of your garden, to stand out, you would need to choose colors that do not blend with their surroundings.
- *Repetition of color schemes can unify the different colors in a garden.* Alternating rows of magentas, for example, would give a sense of unison for the other colors in your garden. This is usually considered as the shortcut approach in planning your colors, and is quite perfect for novice gardeners who wish to dabble with hues and tones.
- *Monotony isn't always bad. You could use different flowers with the same*

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colors. The shape of the said flowers can provide the difference in textures that would give your garden that dramatic effect. Using one or two colors isn't always boring. It really depends on how you execute the same.

- *Every garden needs a focal point.* Usually, this is done through the use of special features, like fountains, a tree, or other similar implements. If no such implements exist, you could use colors instead. If blue is your desired color for example, you could plant a series of blue flowers in the middle of a garden. The reason for a focal point is to catch the attention of eyes that would happen to see the garden. From the focal point, the eyes' sight would spread outwards to experience and enjoy the rest that the garden has to offer.
- *And speaking of focal points, you could use the same technique to draw the attention of your guests from unsightly items in your garden.* Do you have an electricity pole in your garden which you just cannot get rid off? No problem. Simply use focal points to take away the attention that such would command.

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7. The Basics Of Organic Gardening

With the amount of advancements that have been introduced to the gardening world, many gardeners have dreamt, and pursued, a return to much simpler times. After all, there is a greater sense of fulfillment in reaping a bountiful harvest when all you have employed are all natural growing methods, without the aid of artificial supplements that enrich your garden with materials that ensure optimal growth for your plants. A return to basics is more rewarding, and the satisfaction that can be attained from the same is pretty hard to beat.

The thing is, plants are a part of a whole ecosystem of already existing processes. An organic gardener merely realizes the important aspects that contribute to a plant's natural life cycle, and makes sure that they are carried out well. All that is needed are already there, and this makes organic gardening all the more exciting.

What, Exactly, Is Organic Gardening?

Organic gardening can be defined as gardening without the use of artificial or synthetic materials such as chemical fertilizers, pesticides or other enhancements. Many people claim that organic gardening is more about feeding the soil than it is about feeding the plant.

Organic gardeners rely on manure, bone meal, fish and sea weed fertilizers to nourish the soil in the most natural of manners. Other organic gardeners also rely on nitrogen fertilizers that are the solidified form of nitrogen from the air. There are some who also make use of pyrethrum which is an insecticide culled from South African flowers to control the infestation of pests.

If Everything Is Natural, How Can Pests Be Thwarted?

Barriers such as plant collars and row covers of netting can help prevent pest attacks. Pheromone and tangle foot compounds also eliminate pests that have already infested the crops. Also, companion plants can help curtail the number of pests that threatens to damage the organic garden. Cabbage and dills, cabbage and tomatoes, chives and roses, corn and beans, cucumbers and nasturtiums, and garlic and roses are among the popular combinations of companion plants that help eliminate the spread of pests.

Also, there are what many call as beneficial bugs that likewise prevents the increase of pests, as they actually eat them for their sustenance. Bugs like the praying mantis, the lovely ladybugs, the green lacewings, ground beetles, parasitic wasps, pirate bugs, ambush bugs, assassin bugs, and spiders are prime examples of bugs that every organic gardener would love to have for his garden.

Commercial Natural Fertilizers:

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Garden stores also offer a wide array of processed and dried manures that would help enrich the soil so that it would be very beneficial for the crops. Some gardening companies also produce a variety of natural chemicals that have been optimized through years of research. Companies like Vegetables Alive, Tomatoes Alive, Sea Rich and Harvest Alive are just some of the more popular commercial establishments catering to the organic gardening audience.

Organic gardening does provide a different level of excitement for veteran and novice gardeners alike. The return to nature approach has become a novelty in this and age of high end, synthetic gardening supplements. Sometimes, going back to how things are supposed to be can provide the best thrill for any passion, and the same principle is very much true with organic gardening.

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8. Trees Are The Anchors Of Your Landscaping Needs

There are many reasons why people would want to invest in gardens. Be it for a hobby, to increase the value of real estate, and perhaps even as a business to earn some money through the crops you'd be able to harvest. One thing is universal, however. A garden begins with an idea and is commenced with the preparation of a landscape. Indeed, the terrain plays an integral role in determining what kind of garden should take shape. Some terrains are made of slopes. Others are flat. A few are elevated, while there are those with a variety of levels.

Experts will tell you that your landscaping preparations should be anchored on trees. Trees provide that landscaping lift, and they would serve a variety of other purposes as well. They could serve as shades during sunny days. They could also host a tree house for some fun times which the family can enjoy. Some trees even provide bountiful flowers, fruits, berries and foliage throughout the fall, making the property seem more serene and warm.

Truly, trees should be your first investment for your landscaping plan. Everything else would follow them. Here are some tips that would help you proceed properly with the selection and planting of these essential landscaping implements.

- *When planting a tree, leave some space between the sapling and the grass.* A distance of around 18 to 14 inches would suffice. The reason behind this tip is to avoid scarring the young trunk whenever you mow your lawn. Young trees can be quite delicate, a temporary stage until they become sturdy barks that would last through the years.
- *Contrary to popular belief, it is actually advisable to stake saplings in groups of three, with each sapling close to the rest.* This would prevent them from toppling over because of strong winds or harsh weather conditions. They would find strength and support from each other. They should be kept as a group for around 2 years, after which, two of them should be transplanted to other areas so that they won't have to compete for nutrients and that their growth won't be impeded by space constraints.
- *Trees can reduce street noise.* Keep this in mind when looking for a location where you want to plant them. The area fronting the street would be a great option so that you may be able to take advantage of this amazing quality possessed by trees.
- *Trees also add color to their surroundings.* Keep in mind the potential foliage that the different kinds of trees can give so that you'd know what your garden would need best.

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- *You don't have to limit your trees to a single, unifying color.* Some trees do complement each other, and produce an attractive effect when planted side by side. Again, planning is the key. Know the colors that the trees would produce before deciding on what to plant in your backyard.

The best gardens are anchored on trees. Trees can actually increase the value of any property, hence, they are not only essential investments for aesthetic purposes, they are also practical additions for any backyard. Trees can become your best friends when trying to sell your house. And even if you don't plan on taking that route, trees can still give you countless hours of sensory enjoyment.

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9. Beneficial Bugs For Your Garden

Pests. Who likes them, right? For households, they are quite the pesky guests that ruin the aesthetic appeal of our interiors, not to mention the health hazards they pose. For gardens, it's the same ol' story magnified ten times worse. They could ruin our crops even before they could bear some flowers or fruits. They could spoil whatever lavish designs we have planned for our landscape. They could shred the leaves of our plants and curtail the growth of our young sprouts. They could compete with the nutrients we have reserved for our seedlings. Indeed, gardening life would be so much better without these pests.

This is the reason why a lot of veteran and novice gardeners have resorted to a variety of insecticides to get rid of these unwanted pests. Not all chemical solutions are effective, however. Some even cause immeasurable damage to our crops. There should be a better way to free our gardens from the perils brought by these pests.

Thankfully, when it comes to the problem of pests, we could always fight fire with fire. There are a slew of beneficial bugs that we could place in the ecosystem of our gardens. These beneficial bugs, being on top of the food chain hierarchy, do eat most of the harmful pests that make our gardens their breeding grounds. Let's take a look at some of the more popular varieties of these beneficial bugs.

- *The praying mantis.* One of the most effective biological pest control methods known to gardeners and farmers alike, the praying mantis is a slender insect armed with rather sharp front legs designed to capture small pests. These front legs are also the reason for its name, as this insect would appear to be praying whenever it is motionless, waiting for its prey. Praying mantises are quite easy to breed. You don't have to go out of your way to propagate them, as they would naturally deposit their eggs on the leaves of your plants.
- *Lovely ladybugs.* Consider these ladybugs as the janitors of your garden. Though they would have a hard time preying on flying pests, they do feast on tiny, soft bodied insects as well as the eggs and larvae of most harmful pests. Ladybugs are the most common of the 370 species of bugs in North America, so procuring some for your garden won't pose any problems.
- *Green lacewings.* Lacewings look like a cross between bugs and flies. They are characterized by light green exterior and glossy golden eyes. Most of the time, they feed on nectar, honeydew and pollen, things that don't take away to the good health of your crops. Their carnivorous streak is what makes lacewings shine as natural biological pest controls, however. They voraciously feed on mealybugs, red spider mites, and a variety of harmful insects. They also eat the eggs and larvae of their favorite meals.
- *Ground beetles.* These are probably most familiar to many gardeners as

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those large, long-legged bugs that usually have blue-black or brown exteriors. They hide beneath logs and rocks most of the time, and they feed on slugs, snails, cutworms, and root maggots that more often than not feast on the leaves of our sprouts. For this reason, ground beetles are essential partners in your pest control campaign.

- *Parasitic wasps.* Though they're not necessarily bugs, parasitic wasps remain as one of the most effective natural pest control methods you could avail of. They are quite aggressive, as they attack the actual nests and eggs of many harmful pests. No need to wait for them to appear. They destroy the very source of your garden's enemies.

There are more beneficial bugs, and insects, of course, and a mastery of the advantages they could provide will greatly aid you in ridding your garden of the destructive pests that threaten to ruin everything that we have worked for.

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10.Cultivating Herbs Can Be A Rewarding Gardening Experience

Quite a number of gardeners have discovered the many joys associated with herbs. Herbs, you see, can serve a wide variety of purposes. Herbs are quite easy to grow as well. They are not as demanding, nor as taxing, as other crops. Veteran gardeners would always find novel ways of nurturing them, while novice gardeners would find these herbal varieties as the perfect starting specimens for this passion.

Benefits of Herbs:

Herbs have become popular crops for many gardeners because of the several advantages they present. They're not only aesthetic delights, they also serve a variety of purposes and functions that transcends the usual benefits that can be derived from other plants. Let's take a look at some of these aforementioned benefits.

- Herbs can be used to embellish meals for delectable pleasures for the family. They can be used as garnishments for salads and soups, as complements for other vegetables or sauces, as seasonings for meat, or as main dishes when it comes to particular kinds of herbs.
- Some of these herbs also possess medicinal qualities that could improve the family members' health.
- Other herbs give off delightful fragrances that could light up the soul, refresh the mind and invigorate the body.

Herb Gardening Inside The House:

As we have mentioned earlier, cultivating herbs afford you the flexibility to contend with space restrictions and changing weather. Herbs are quite easy to grow, and they can even be cultivated indoors. All you need are three basic things:

- 1 pots
- 2 pebbles and gravel
- 3 trays or pans

Once these are ready, everything can be prepared in a matter of minutes. Simply place the pebbles and gravel at the bottom of the pot. This is to ensure that the proper pH level would be retained by the soil. Indeed, after the pebbles and gravel have been positioned in their specified place, just fill up the said pot with soil mixture. You could create your own soil mixture, of course, by mixing gardening soil with fertilizer. Make sure that the fertilizer is not odorous, as you don't want to stink up the house.

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Since your herbs would need an adequate amount of sunlight, though not too much, a window facing south would be the perfect place for the young sprouts. To protect the window sill, place a pan that would support the pot.

Yes, just as simple as that and you would be harvesting some herbs in a few weeks.

Outdoor Herb Gardening:

Not all households are built for indoor gardening, even for simple to cultivate herbs. In which case, traditional outdoor gardening can be resorted to. Your only consideration with this approach is how much sun a particular herb type would need. Some herbs require at least 8 hours of sun, while others require less. Determine the needs of the herbs you wish to grow, and plant them in appropriate places. Those that need much sunlight can be planted in open areas. Those that require less sunlight can be planted to shaded areas.

Outdoor herb gardening also affords you the luxury of being creative with your herb garden. Most people, however, prefer to plant their herbs alongside vegetables. Others are more imaginative, as they even plant their herbs in a circular pattern for more visual appearance.

Popular Herb Types:

Here is a list of popular herbs that many gardeners have come to adore. Their popularity can be traced to the wonderful harvests they provide and the ease by which they can be cultivated.

- Dill
- Chives
- Basil
- Mint
- Parsley
- Oregano
- Sage
- Rosemary
- Thyme
- Sweet marjoram

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11. Experimenting With Flowers

If there's one aspect of gardening that has proved popular throughout many centuries, it's the constant quest for beautiful bounties. And what better way to bring out the aesthetic potentials from any garden than experimenting with flowers? Truly, flowers would provide the colors and the fragrance that could instantly transform any series of crops into the centerpiece of any landscape. You could grow some bulbs, which are fairly easy, and embellish your garden with a host of perennials and annuals to bring it to life. The possible combinations, actually, are quite limitless. You could push your imagination to come up with unique and novel combinations that would brighten up your garden into a lush space of glorious blooms.

But raising flowers isn't something you could simply jump into. Much is needed to be known before you try dabbling with these lovely blooms.

- *There are literally thousands of different types of flowers.* But they can be divided into two main categories: perennials and annuals. Perennials produce flowers every year. Annuals complete its growth in one growing season and thereafter wither. Annuals, however, are known for more sparkling blooms that could instantly give life to any garden once they reach full bloom.
- *Flowers bring color to any garden, and color has a variety of therapeutic effects for anyone who gets to experience the same.* Color, for example, can affect a person's emotions. A garden bursting with different hues and tones would surely liven up the days of any person who gets to see it. Gardens that are located in front of the house can radiate with warm and welcoming colors that guests would surely enjoy. Gardens at the backyard can make use of more relaxing colors perfect for a carefree afternoon. It is important to plan your colors beforehand so you may be properly guided as to what flowers to choose for your garden.
- *Blending colors is the key.* This requires prior preparations. Try to visualize the garden you have in mind, and list down the color scheme that would form in your head. Then, it's just a matter of determining the color combination's feasibility. Once you have the colors listed down, try to find appropriate flowers that would provide blooms that would result in the colors you want. Colors should dictate your choice of flowers and not the other way around, least you settle for a trial and error approach in coming up with a radiant garden.
- *Try bridging colors as well.* Sharp contrasts may appear amateurish. A gradual change in hues and depth of colors is the way to go. You're not aiming for a rainbow... you're trying to achieve a color scheme relaxing for the eyes.

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- *In line with the tip above, try to take advantage of magentas and yellows.* These colors are perfect to link other brighter and more solid tones, and are perfect complements for any garden aiming for a well balanced color scheme.

Colors require planning. A blueprint for your garden is needed if you wish to come up with a garden that would burst with the most pleasant colors for all seasons. It's not something you could simply trifle with from the get go.

Flower seeds can be bought from major gardening stores the world over. Some flowers grow depending on season, so preparations as to when to sow the seedlings is also necessary.

The rewards, however, of being able to achieve the colors you want are immense. You'd have a garden that would be the envy of everyone, and the sense of fulfillment that can be derived from the same is something that you could be proud of for many years to come.

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12. Feed Your Plants By Feeding Your Soil

It has been said that gardening is more about feeding the soil than it is about feeding the plants. In a way this is true. Soil is very important for plants as the majority of the nutrients needed can be derived from the ground upon which they are planted. Soil contains organic materials necessary for a plant's growth. The roots of a plant are firmly connected to the soil to gather these essential nutrients for its sustenance.

Once you take care of your soil, the soil will take care of your plant. Hence, we could say that the essential principle of gardening is nourishing your soil. So if you want healthy plants for your garden, it is vital that you highly invest on soil.

But how, exactly, could you nourish your soil? It all starts with knowledge. Below are some things you should know about the primary conditions necessary for your plants' full development.

Knowing Your Soil:

Though there are a great variety of soils available for your use, there are some things which are universal about them. All of them contain water, air, minerals and other organic materials, for example. Though the proportions of these ingredients may vary, they are all present in good, gardening soil. Organic matter consists of partially decomposed remains of soil organisms and plant life, and compost if such has been applied before. Organic matter also helps retain water in the soil. Good, gardening soil holds up to 90% of its weight in water as it absorbs and stores essential nutrients. However, gardening soil that could hold 25% water is sufficient for most plants.

Water is stored in the pores of the soil. This is the reason why you should avoid stepping on growing beds, or applying heavy weight on the soil. You won't want your soil compact, as such would impair its water retentiveness when the spores disappear.

It's A Two-Way Street:

Plants help the soil maintain its gardening potentials. Fungi, bacteria, tiny lichens and moss, most of which are considered as plant life, grow on crevices and deposit organic materials in the soil. As time passes by, these organic materials are pushed to the lower levels of the soil to work their magic. Also, new compounds are formed once these organic matters interact with water, air and other elements.

The Living Soil:

Soil hosts a variety of bacteria and fungi that help retain water and feed the plants with a variety of nutritious elements. These bacteria and fungi live on animal and

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plant residues deposited on the soil. They break down complex compounds into smaller, simpler forms that the plants could take in. Soil also stores these essential nutrients for future use. They are not only good for current crops, but for the next sets that would be planted in the same area.

Balance Is The Key:

Naturally, gardening entails the application of proper treatment for the soil so that it could be improved. Balance should be attained in three key areas, namely:

- structure
- texture
- porosity

As with everything else, anything in excess ruins the balance that is needed for optimal existence. So diligent care for the soil is needed to ensure that the elements above retain the right amount needed for the maximum efficiency of the soil and the excellent health of the plants it would adopt.

There are many tactics available for the gardener to achieve this balance. It's just a matter of complying with them well so that you could control the development of your soil, and consequently, your plants, to even manipulate the factors that the naked eye would never be able to see.

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13. Help Your Plants Endure The Colder Months

Frost can become a plant's worst nightmare, and consequently, a gardener's main enemy as well. Imagine having to grow vines to support your crop of tomatoes, and the cold climate kills the vines before the tomatoes can ripen. The same goes for melons. Who wants to enjoy but a few harvests of fruits that you have prepared and waited for in months? You will want some precious weeks of growing time, and you will need to ensure that your plants would get the same.

Hence, here are some tips that would give you an early jump on spring so that you could enjoy a most bountiful harvest that would reward those many months of gardening chores.

- *Know the earliest frost-free date.* Determining the same would depend on your geographical location. The key here is to determine the earliest time when frost recedes to give way to the warmer days. You could consult with your county extension agent for this information, as they keep records of the same.
- *Once the earliest frost-free date is determined, simply count backwards.* The number of weeks that would govern your count would depend on the period required by the growth of the plant you wish to rear. This would give you an idea when you should start sowing your seeds.
- *Should you sow on your lawn?* No. You should sow your seeds in containers or soil beds that can be placed inside your house. This is called indoor gardening, though it is only temporary. The trick here is in getting a head start on spring, so that you would just have to transfer the young sprouts to the garden or the lawn once the warmer days come.
- *One important consideration is the quality of the soil.* Try to avoid garden soil as the cold weathers may have allowed the formation of fungus that would contaminate your budding indoor crop. To start seeds, you could simply purchase seed starter mixes from most retail gardening stores. There should be a seed starter mix for the type of plant you have in mind.
- *Try windowsill gardening.* Most garden stores sell kits that would help you establish windowsill hotbeds or cold frames. Or you could build one yourself. Windowsill gardening would help ensure that your young crop would receive an adequate amount of sunshine for the photosynthetic processes required for their healthy growth. Most flowers and vegetables need at least 6 hours of sunlight everyday for maximum performance.
- *Transplanting your seedlings require some commitment and diligence.* Try to toughen them up by exposing them to the harsher conditions outdoor before

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removing them from their containers and placing them on your garden or lawn. This would help your seedling acclimatize to their new environment, and would help ensure that they would survive the transfer.

- *The soil may have hardened because of the cold climate.* During the first days of the warmer months, and right before transplanting, try to till the soil and moisten it for a few days. This would guarantee that the soil would have optimal conditions required to support the delicate seedlings. Dig a hole in the ground of the lawn or the garden, the size of which can accommodate a root ball. Gently place your seedlings on such a hole, and cover it gently, with enough space to allow for easy sprouting.

Your gardening enjoyment does not have to be dictated by the changing seasons. This would also provide for you a bountiful harvest or lush colors of blooms come the right time, and the fact that you will be able to achieve the same despite the harsh weather would make your garden the envy of the people who will get to enjoy the same.

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14. Ten Time-Saving Gardening Tips

A lot of people want to try their hands at gardening. What's stopping them? Well, gardening is perceived as a time-consuming endeavor. With the demands of daily life, some people do find it hard to allot a few hours for the needs required by maintaining a garden. This has deprived these people the joys that can be gathered from growing a variety of plants.

But gardening does not have to command lots of hours per day. There are many time-saving techniques which you could use to drastically reduce the tasks necessitated by preserving a sustainable garden. Let's take a look at ten wonderful time and labor efficient tips that would help make gardening a breeze.

- *Regularly mow the lawn.* Often, people sow their seeds or plant their sprouts in areas which require a lot of hand trimming. By regularly cutting down grass, you'd be able to save a lot of time. Also, place flagstones, bricks or other dividers at the edges of the lawn to reduce the necessity of hand trimming, weeding and clipping.
- *Keep your gardening tools sharp.* The changing seasons can make them rusty and dull. Also, soil accumulation can lead to the same effects. By cleaning them after usage or during the colder months, you'd be able to keep them these tools in tiptop shape come the busiest gardening months of the year.
- *Use plastic buried in soil to separate flowerbeds from the rest of the lawn.* The plastic would keep plants and grass in their proper places for great aesthetic effects. Additionally, this would also ensure that the plants would have lesser competition for the nutrients they need.
- *Choose new trees and shrubs carefully.* Trees and shrubs require a lot of pruning in general, but some types would necessitate less attention. Trees and shrubs, the mature heights and sizes of which won't overgrow their allotted space, don't have to require chopping off some of their parts that overextend their desired space.
- *Allot a few minutes in applying appropriate insecticide on your garden.* An ounce of prevention is always better than a pound of cure. Taking time to prevent bugs and other pests from infesting in your garden would prove easier than ridding the same of these insects later on.
- *Plan in advance.* Write down important gardening tasks that should be done next year, in accordance with the changing seasons.
- *Make use of controlled-release fertilizers.* This would ensure that your plants

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would receive proper nutrients all year long, and you won't have to keep adding fertilizers every time the season changes.

- *Invest on sprinklers, especially those with automated timers.* Let them take care of the watering. You don't have to go through the actual watering of your plants, as such can be time consuming and exhaustive depending on the size of your garden. Sprinklers would do the job for you.
- *Consider using wildflowers instead of grass.* Wildflowers are hardier, and more pleasant to the eyes. They could also help embellish difficult corners and slopes. More importantly, wildflowers don't need to be trimmed. You'll save a lot of time and gas since you won't have to mow them down.
- *Use mulch.* You could gather the materials for the same from compost, old leaves, bark chips, shavings, grass clippings or black plastic. Just spread them on your lawn to help kill weeds and sustain the moisture of the soil for the best health for your plants. This would help you save countless hours from having to watering, weeding and doing a variety of general care chores.

Indeed, gardening does not have to be a job. Much of the tasks can be significantly reduced with proper steps and procedures. The guidelines above would help give you a more enjoyable time in maintaining a beautiful garden.

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15. Flowers That Would Perpetually Reward You With Beautiful Blossoms

Most gardeners prefer perennials over annuals. The reason is quite simple. Perennials would reward your garden with beautiful blooms every single year, while annuals are only good for single blossoms during their lifetime. With perennials, you won't have to plant new crops to replace old ones which have served their purpose. Perennials will continue to give lovely blooms every season, as they will endure many cycles.

There are many kinds of perennials to choose from. Naturally, your choice of perennials would depend on a variety of factors. Your choice of colors for your garden, for example, is an important determinant of the types of perennials you want to invest on. The texture you want to achieve is also an important consideration for your choice. Also, how they would complement other existing or planned crops would likewise play a role in your decision.

To help you come up with perennials to use, here is a list of the more popular varieties that many gardeners have come to adore.

- *There are perennials that bloom within 8 to 12 weeks.* These are perfect for gardeners who are in a hurry to come up with a presentable landscape. Some of these perennial varieties are Achillea (common yarrow), Anthemis Tinctoria (golden marguerite), Chrysanthemum Parthenium (feverfew or matricaria), Gaillardia Grandiflora (blanket flower), Phlox Paniculata (garden phlox), and Rudbeckia (black-eyed Susan or coneflower).
- *Saponaria Officinalis L., or bouncing bet, produce clusters of pink, red or white flowers of 3 inches length during summer and autumn.* They grow to as much as 24 by 20 inches and make good bases for any garden.
- *Phlox Stolonifera grows by as much as 1 foot by 1 foot.* This variety comes in a variety of colors and is shade tolerant. They produce beautiful spring blooms.
- *Daffodils are perhaps the most well-known of all perennials, as they have become timeless favorites in many circles.* They likewise grow to as much as 1 foot by 1 foot, and are characterized by sweet fragrances that can give life to any environment.
- *Lilies are likewise great favorites.* They make dramatic displays, as some varieties grow to as much as 3 to 6 feet tall. Just like daffodils, these perennials also give out delightful fragrances that could invigorate the mind and the soul.

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- *Lavenders on the other hand can have purple, pink or white flower spikes during the summer months.* They are also fragrant, and they could grow to as much as 2 feet by 2 feet when properly cared for.
- *Lilies of the valley are perfect for shady areas, what with their ability to spread in low grounds and cover the garden with an abundance of white and pink flowers.* Most gardens designed to look like flowerbeds actually cultivate this type of lilies. Lilies of the valley grow to as much as 9 inches, and with their light hues, they could add so much color to those darker areas in the garden.

So if you wish to reward yourself and your garden with beautiful blossoms all year round, do invest on perennials. Their extended flowering periods are perfect for, well, perennial gardens fit for all seasons.

Most of the perennials above can be purchased as pre-started seedlings, or as seeds in most gardening retail shops. All you have to do is to plan your garden beforehand and choose the most appropriate perennials as base, or even as the centerpiece for your backyard foliage.

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Conclusion

Now you know how to take care and grow your own beautiful garden. Just decide on what type of garden you want, which type and color of flowers, and begin planting! Soon enough you will have a wonderful garden that your neighbors will be dying to see.

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