

# FLOWER AND GARDEN BED PREPARATION AND CARE

## Selecting a garden or flower bed site:

Locate your bed:

- a. In front of shrubs or a fence that will give a plain, solid background.
- b. Where the bed can be seen from your patio or window.
- c. In an area with good drainage.
- d. In a sunny or semi-shaded area.

Do not locate the bed:

- a. Under the drip line of a roof.
- b. Under heavy shade trees.
- c. In normal traffic areas of people and pets.
- d. In very windy, drafty areas.

## Preparing the Soil

Most plants like a neutral and near-neutral pH soil. Soils in South Texas are alkaline or high pH, except the very sandy areas. The adaptation of a plant to any section of the county may very well depend on what properties the soils contain.

Soils must do several things:

- a. Be heavy enough to anchor the plant's roots.
- b. Be loose enough for roots to spread.
- c. Permit the free entry of air and water.
- d. Have good drainage.
- e. Be spongy enough to hold food and water.

Tools needed for flower bed preparation:

- a. A sharp shovel.
- b. A turning fork or garden fork.
- c. A sharp hoe.
- d. A garden rake.
- e. A piece of plastic, burlap or canvas to lay soil on instead of lawn,

What soil type is best?

Heavy clay soils do not allow good drainage or good root movement.

Fine sandy soils do not hold moisture very long.

Therefore something in between sandy soils and clay soils are the best. Loam soils are a good mixture of sand, organic mater and a little clay and are ideal for flower or garden beds. Clay or heavy soils, which are typical in the Valley, can be improved by adding peat moss, compost, perlite, decomposed manure or any good organic matter. **DO NOT add sand to your clay soil or you will create a brick. Organic matter is the only solution.**

### Steps in Preparing Soil:

1. Remove all grass and weeds.
2. Spade and turn soil to 6-inch depth.
3. Break up clods and smooth.
4. Add a 1/2 inch layer of organic matter (peatmoss, compost or decomposed manure)
5. Add four pounds superphosphate per 100 square feet, spreading uniformly.
6. In clay and very sandy soils, add 2 to 4 inches of organic matter.
7. Re-work soil with a spade or turning fork to depth of 6 inches.
8. Wet down, allowing the soil to settle and then level with a rake or hoe.
9. Your bed should now be ready to plant.

### **Buying Plants, Seeds and Bulbs**

Seeds: With seeds you usually have greater selection.

Seeds can be started 6-8 weeks before transplanting to your outside bed.

Direct seeding takes longer to bloom.

Plants: More expensive than seeds.

Faster developing.

Earlier flowers.

Bulbs: Bulbs are generally planted in December, January and February for spring.

Bulbs should be planted to a depth of 2 or 3 times its diameter. (i.e. a 1.5" bulb should be covered with 3-4 inches of soil.)

\*Exception-Amaryllis should be planted with crown above ground.

### **Plant Spacing**

Most gardeners crowd plants. Think of plants in their mature state, when planting, and allow full growth potential. A spacing of 6-8 inches for small growing annuals and 12-18 inches for tall or spreading plants is necessary for best growth. Plant the largest plants in the back. This allows full display of blooms later on. Set plants at the same depth at which they were grown. Place roots at full depth; do not wad them up in a ball. Buy green, healthy plants. Avoid poor, sickly or cheap plants.

### **Watering**

A slow, thorough soaking of freshly transplanted flowers beds is necessary to get your plants started. More frequent, light waterings may be necessary for direct seeded beds and while transplants are small.

### **Mulching**

Mulches help retain moisture, help keep down weeds, and help keep soil temperatures lower. But they also harbor insects and sometimes enhance diseases. Bark mulch and shredded mulch are ideal, as they usually do not harbor insects or disease.

### **Fertilizers**

Fertilizers are always sold by analysis. A 10-10-10 for instance is 10% nitrogen (N), 10% phosphorus (P), and 10% potassium (K). A good flower or garden fertilizer should contain 15 to 20% N, 20% phosphorous and 0-5% potassium. The latter, potassium, is not really needed in our Valley soils. One good fertilizer for this area is 16-20-0;

however, any other will do if this one is not available. When seedlings are well established and growing, one tablespoon should be spread uniformly around each plant and watered in. When using transplants, wait 10 to 14 days then fertilize as above. Repeat every four weeks during growing season.

### **Cultivation**

Controlling weeds and breaking soil crusts are the only reasons for cultivation. Care should be given to avoid root damage to bedding plants.

### **Staking**

Tall plants that have weak stems may require stakes to keep them upright. Rains, winds, and heavy flower heads sometimes cause plants to fall over.

(Information source: *Successful Gardening in the Magic Valley of Texas*, Dist. VI, Texas Garden Clubs, Inc.)

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