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Tips on Gardening

By Betty Frankel

BASIC GARDENING
Every gardener wants a good garden, but tender loving care is only one of the necessary factors. A wise choice of location and a knowledge of basic garden practices are also necessary. The right plant in the right place is a must for good horticulture as well as for good garden design.

The basic element in a garden is the soil. This is a term used to designate the loose topsoil covering the earth's crust. Below it is the sub-soil (in which plants will not grow) and the bed rock. Geologists tell us that the earth was once solid rock. Action of water and wind crumbled this into fine particles and material and was not true soil. Only when the first minute living creatures emerged onto the land and left an accumulation of organic material did soil start to form. It takes about one thousand years to make about an inch of soil.

SOIL HAS FIVE COMPONENTS and all are essential to plant life. In addition to the mineral particles and there are also minute living organisms, water, and air. The soil serves the plants in three ways. It holds the plant firmly in position, supplies water needed by the plant, and provides minerals essential to the plant's growth and well-being.

Soils may be classified on the basis of the size of the soil particles and the amount of organic material. Sandy soils have large particles and lose their moisture rapidly. Clay soils have very small particles and are heavy, sticky, and retentive of moisture. Loam, the ideal garden soil, is a blend of sand, clay and humus.

HUMUS IS THE TERM applied to the decayed organic matter, whether of plant or animal origin. Humus liberates nitrogen compounds needed for plant growth and is a food supply for the soil bacteria which are also essential for the growth of the plant. It tends to separate the soil particles thus enabling more air to be in the soil and it has a spongy texture which holds water in the soil. The greater the amount of humus the more fertile the soil is. If humus is added to either light sand or to heavy clay these soils will be much improved. Peat, leaf-mold, compost, manure, and cover-crops which are turned under are all good sources of humus.

JUST AS SOIL is the basic element in the garden, digging is the basic garden operation. Humus is incorporated into the soil by digging it in. After a layer has been spread on the surface. When digging, go down only to about an inch below the top of the sub-soil. This small amount of infertile soil will be mixed into the enriched topsoil layer and eventually over a period of years the layer of fertile soil will become deeper. If the layer of good soil is very shallow it is good garden practice to remove some of the sub-soil to a depth of about two or three inches and replace it with good loam or humus. Digging is also of benefit in improving the soil texture and in aerating the soil.

Sandy soils dry out quickly and can be dug early in the Spring and thus are useful for planting early crops. Clay soils hold moisture and should not be dug, or even walked on, until they are dry enough not to stick to the shoes. Their texture can be definitely damaged by being compacted when wet. Conversely, if left too long without cultivation after a rain a hard crust will form on the surface. Clay soils are thus more difficult to work but have the advantages of retaining moisture and fertility and if handled properly many plants will thrive on them.

THE DIGGING DONE before planting is called "tilling" and the stirring up of the soil later is "cultivation." All garden work but have the advantages of retaining moisture and fertility and if handled properly many plants will thrive on them.

In late Fall or in Spring before doing regular, especially after a rain or watering. The loose soil helps the moisture penetrate and prevents rapid run-off and loss through evaporation. Cultivating removes weeds, a mulch covering the soil will aid in these things.

Drainage is important for a good garden. If the garden is on a gentle slope the drainage will surely be good. If the water table is high or the soil is heavy and water stands on the soil only a very few specialized plants will grow. Although it is costly, drainage can be improved by laying down porous drain tiles or gravel, or making a day-well or pit filled with gravel for the excess water to drain into.

THE AMOUNT OF LIGHT available must be considered when planning a garden. Vegetables and most flowers need sunshine, so choose a location that has full sun if this is possible. There's no point in trying to grow vegetables in the shade. Although most annuals and perennials need sun, full sun all day is not essential for all varieties, and there are many kinds that will flower in partial shade. Trees and shrubs, too, vary in their light requirements. Select plants that will thrive under the particular conditions that prevail in your yard.

The basic equipment needed by the gardener is very simple, particularly for a small garden. A trowel and a hand cultivator are essential. The gardener must work on hands and knees with these, but it is an advantage to get close to the plants, especially when they are small.

REMEMBERS: Rake debris off lawns and clean up flower beds, burning stalks and foliage to prevent possible disease spread. . . . Feed lawns. . . . Seed lawns. . . . Prune trees and shrubs to remove broken or diseased branches and to improve the shape. . . . Make plans on paper for landscape changes. . . . Plan vegetable and flower gardens and order seed. . . . Start seed indoors.

"Don't Do-It-Yourself" Is Sound Advice For Some

It's home improvement season, and projects ranging from painting to plastering are claiming the attention of growing numbers of home handymen. For do-it-yourself improvements alone, the expenditure this year will be, it is estimated, two billion dollars.

All of which is fine — when the do-it-yourself jobs turn out to be real improvements. But there are many projects which should be clearly labeled "don't-do-it-yourself," cautions William M. Wolfson, president of Peoples National Fund, Inc., nationwide home-improvement finance specialists.

In addition to installing roofing and siding, jobs whose sheer size should discourage most do-it-yourselfers, there are several other projects that should be done only by an expert. As a general rule, homeowners should avoid tampering with the home's electrical system. Unless he is fully qualified to do electrical work, a homeowner runs the risk of serious electric shock or burn and may create a fire hazard if improperly installed wiring is put into use.

Another area in which the expert should reign is in the matter of plumbing and installation of bathroom and kitchen fixtures. New pipes must integrate well with the rest of the plumbing system. If they do not, it can affect the entire system.

Even some seemingly simple remodeling jobs can have serious consequences. For instance, widening an archway or removing a wall between two rooms could significantly alter the load-bearing structure. A close check for diseases and pests can be made and it gives one the opportunity to appreciate the close-up details of the beauty of growing leaf.

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