



Use the winter months to plan your garden spaces

Some Oklahomans may still have their holiday decorations up, but that doesn't mean it's too early to start thinking about gardening – especially for those who may not have ever gardened before.

The cold winter months provide gardeners with time to explore different options for their gardens. And for new gardeners, this time of year is a great opportunity to map out their landscape to find the perfect spots for both vegetable and flower gardens. With proper planning, a garden can provide fresh, high-quality fruits and vegetables from spring through fall, as well as colorful flowers that add visual interest to the landscape.

One important aspect of gardening is choosing the site. An area with full or near full sun exposure, coupled with well-drained fertile soil is ideal. A nearby water source also is needed. In addition, select a location away from trees and shrubs, if possible, so there's less competition for light, water and nutrients.

If the proposed garden site doesn't drain well, or the topsoil is thin or has too much sand or clay, raised beds or containers are great alternatives to the traditional garden bed. A good quality garden soil should be used in raised beds, while non-soil growing media is best for container gardening.

Successful gardening doesn't happen by chance. There are some tried and true tips gardeners should follow to help prevent some common gardening problems from happening or helping overcome those that do occur. Some tips include:

- Sample soil and have it tested every three to four years.
- Follow directions on fertilizer labels.
- Improve soil by adding organic materials such as yard waste compost or compost manure.
- Use plants recommended for your growing zone.
- Use mulch to help conserve moisture, control weeds and reduce fruit rots.
- Examine the garden regularly to stay ahead of potential problems.
- Use pest control measures only on those insects that are known to be pests.
- Rotate specific crop family locations each year to avoid insect and disease buildup.

Try to avoid these mistakes:

- Planting too closely prevents walking or working in the garden and can interfere with normal plant development.
- Spreading fertilizer directly on plant roots, stems or seeds.
- Watering too frequently or excessively so the soil doesn't have a chance to dry out.

- Allowing weeds to grow large before pulling them.
- Cultivating deeply, which can result in root injury
- Using chemicals not specifically recommended for garden crops.
- Planting varieties not recommended for your growing zone.

Gardening is a great hobby and can provide hours of enjoyment for the whole family.

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