

# HOME & GARDEN

## Preparing your garden

Whether this is your first attempt at planting a garden or you've just got the planting itch, preparing a new garden provides a great deal of fun and enjoyment.

The most difficult part of the gardening process, by far, is learning how to have patience. With the first warm days of spring, many gardeners will be tempted to start planting right away. Avoid the temptation and do some basic homework first. Planting too early is a recipe for failure and frustration.

### DETERMINE WHAT WILL GROW

Before you rush out and purchase your plants, it's important to know where you plan to plant them. There are three key factors that determine what plants will grow in a given spot: soil composition, soil moisture and sunlight.

Soil moisture and composition can be influenced to a certain degree. When it comes to sunlight, you must accept what Mother Nature bestows.

Remember, plants that require full sun need at least six hours of direct sunlight per day. Plants located in shady areas (under trees, or the north side of a building) should be able to thrive with only a few hours of direct sunlight per day.

If you choose a shady area, there are many wonderful plants that will thrive in the shade. Consult with your local garden centre to be sure.

### NEXT STEP IS YOUR SOIL TYPE

Soil consists of sand, silt and clay. The best type of garden soil is loam, which consists of about 40% sand, 40% silt and 20% clay.

Soil type can be easily determined by a simple test. Grab handful of soil and press it into a ball. If the soil cannot hold its shape, then it's probably too sandy. Next try to break the ball apart with your thumb. A good soil will break apart easily, if it doesn't, you've probably got too much clay in it.

Fortunately, if your soil contains too much clay, silt or sand, you can enhance it with organic matter. With soil that contains too much sand or silt, you can add topsoil and peat moss, or compost. If your soil contains too much clay, compost or peat moss and sand can be added.

In some cases, adding sand to soil can

have a negative effect by creating a type of concrete. But adding sand to a clay-heavy soil will sometimes help loosen the clay and allow for proper drainage.

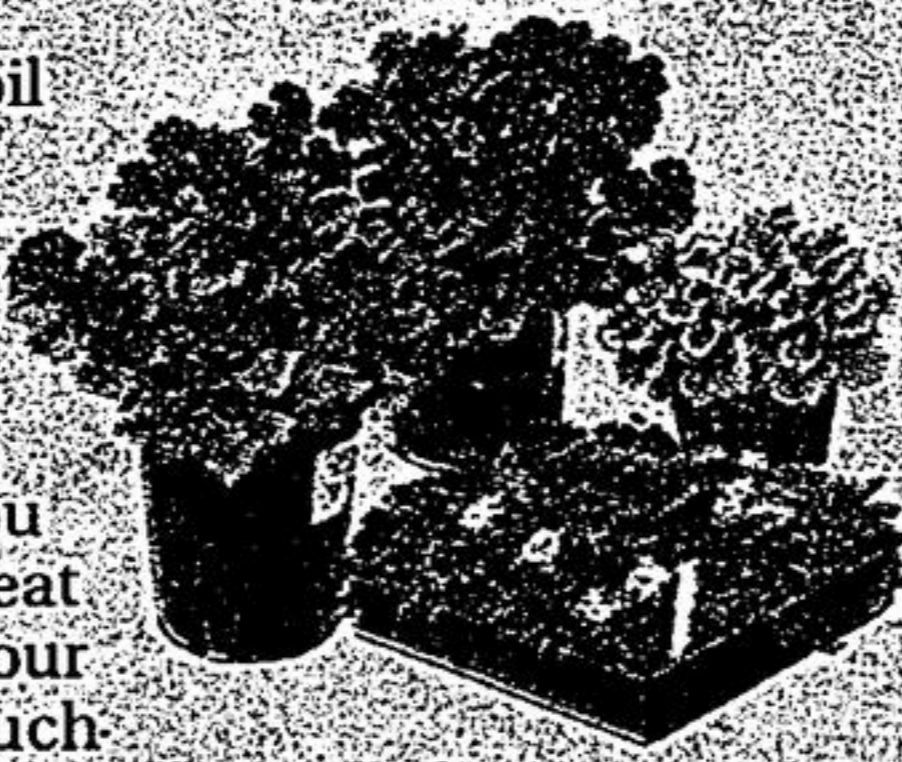
### KEEP AN EYE ON MOISTURE

If your garden is in a low-lying area with lots of moisture, your garden could be subject to wetness for long stretches of time. In this case, consider a raised bed, but choose plants that don't mind lots of water. Conversely, if you have a dry plot, frequent watering may not be enough. In this case, it's best to choose plants that are not as water-hungry.

### WORK WITH MOTHER NATURE

The best recipe for planting a garden is to work with Mother Nature, not against Her. For instance, roses will grow in shady areas but you'll find yourself feeding them more fertilizer and spraying more fungicide than if you'd planted them in a sunny spot. Azaleas in bloom may look wonderful at the front of your home where there is no shade. But if you'd planted them in a shady spot they are less likely to attract lace bugs.

So, work with Mother Nature in determining which plants go where; it will save you a lot of time, money and hassle.



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