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TIPS FOR A BEAUTIFUL PERENNIAL GARDEN

Having a beautiful perennial garden takes thought and work, but the results can be very rewarding. Proper planning, soil preparation and maintenance are the keys to successful gardening. In this newsletter we will discuss planning the garden, soil preparation, choosing plants and planting.

There are many factors to consider in the planning of your garden; the first is determining site conditions.

EXPOSURE - A southern exposure will get the most sun and will be warmer in general; gardens on a western side receive more sun than those facing east; a northern exposure is cooler and more moist. Also consider the direction of the prevailing winds which can affect soil moisture and do winter damage.

LIGHT - A sun garden receives at least six hours of direct sunlight between the hours of 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. A light shade area is one in which you can see your shadow. Semi-shade means two hours of direct sun or dappled all day sun only (indirect sun resulting from trees).

MOISTURE - Is your area moist or boggy; on the dry side or inaccessible for watering?

PHYSICAL FEATURES - Keep in mind any existing trees and shrubs, rock outcropping, ponds or streams that need to be worked into your garden design. A steep slope may need to be terraced. Also take note of any underground utilities or water lines.

SOIL TYPE - Clay soils need amendments such as gypsum, peat or other organic material to increase aeration and drainage (*do not add sand*). Sandy soils need the addition of organic matter to reduce loss of nutrients from the soil. The optimum soil pH for the widest range of plants is slightly acidic, 5.5 - 6.5. To lower pH levels, apply a water soluble sulfur or iron sulfate. Lime will help to raise pH levels but keep in mind that lime can be fatal to some plants such as Japanese Iris. Your county extension agent can help with soil testing to help determine your pH levels.

In designing your garden there are some basic principles that should be applied

PROPORTION - The scale of your plantings should be in good relationship to the surroundings; smaller plants for a small area, larger plants and trees for a large area.

REPETITION - Repetition of one design element throughout the garden will achieve greater unity; this can be texture, color or shape. You need to decide the **size and shape** for your flower beds and plant **arrangement** - plants should be arranged in "drifts" of different heights. Use taller plants in back and "stair-step" down to smaller plants if doing a border, using the tallest plants in middle if doing an island.

COLOR - Color is the most personal of all decisions you will make. Reds, oranges and gold are hot colors and tend to bring the plants closer and make the garden appear smaller. Cool colors, blues and purples, seem to recede and appear farther away, making the garden seem larger. Use cool colors in mass for close-up viewing and hot colors for a more dramatic statement.

In general, **grouping** plants in 3's or 5's works well, however if your garden is to be viewed from a distance, groups of 12 - 18 may be appropriate. Larger, more spectacular plants can stand alone as an accent. **Profile and texture** are important so be sure to mix upright growing plants in with the more rounded forms.

PREPARING THE BEDS - Using a garden hose, outline the area to be dug. For an informal area, gentle curves work better than long straight lines. An island bed can be a large oval or kidney bean shape. You should then water the grass to get the roots activated. Next, spray the entire area with Round-Up Weed and Grass Killer according to label directions - it usually takes about two weeks to kill completely. The garden area should be dug or rototilled to a depth of 12" - 18" with one fourth of the area being organic matter such as peat moss, leaf mold from your compost pile, composted barnyard manure or any combination of these. For each 100 square feet of garden space add the following: 5 lbs. super phosphate (or 10 lbs. bone meal), 5 - 10 lbs. green sand (contains nutrients for disease resistance and minor elements), 5 - 10 lbs. gypsum depending on heaviness of soil (a soil conditioner especially for clay soils), and 2 lbs. Osmocote fertilizer. Till all of these amendments into the soil, rake smooth and your flower bed is ready and waiting.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PLANTS - You will need to select plants suitable for your particular garden plan. Your plants should be *compatible to your site*; dry, moist/boggy, sunny, shady, and *appropriate for your specific use or design*; for cutting, for drying, for fragrance, a rock garden, a meadow garden, for color scheme, a butterfly/hummingbird garden etc. After studying the myriad of perennials available (*Andy's can provide you with a perennial selection guide*), you will want to base your final selection on the following criteria: color, height, bloom time, profile and texture, spacing requirements, hardiness zone.

PLANTING YOUR PERENNIALS - When you take your plants home, be sure to keep them in the shade and well watered until planted in the garden. Plants from containers can be planted just as they are; simply remove them from the pot, "fluff" out the roots and plant at the same depth as they were in the containers. If your container plant is root bound, cut off the bottom 1/2" and score the sides of the compacted soil and roots. This promotes root activity and enables them to spread out properly. Tamp the soil down to get rid of air spaces. Water deeply and mulch immediately. You will have to water often until the new plants are established. You can plant perennials at any time, even in the heat of summer, as long as you provide adequate water.

Excerpts from "Perennial Handbook" by Andre Viette Farms



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one flower at a time.***