



Garden Design Tips:

See 'Quick Spring Start' on the last page if your bed exists.

Basic Considerations

How will you use your yard? What style do you want?
Where are the views? What are the problems?
Where do you want shade...Where do you want sun?
Where do you want privacy?
Where do you want utilities (lighting, trash, compost, faucet)
How much work can you handle?

Make a sketch with your house in the middle (show north) - add arrows.

Scale, Color, Bloom Time

Pick the shape, ultimate size and color that fits.

What house color or other background is there?
When do you want the bloom color (spring, summer, fall, continuous)?
(If you are never home in August, don't plant for it.)
What are the colors and bloom times of the surrounding plants?
Leaf color and textures (silvers, grays, reds and browns break up the mass of green).
(Don't forget fall foliage color combinations!)
Consider fragrance, fruit, attraction for birds, butterflies.
Consider disease, pest resistance.

Oversized plants trees and shrubs soon become a maintenance headache!

Make a design showing shape, height and color.

Identify Specific Plants

Shade (1-4 hrs), partial shade (4-6 hrs.) or sun (6-8 hrs.)
Wet or dry, root competition or not.
Identify specific plants that fit the spot (for conditions, shape, size and color).
Keep vegetables 10 feet away from your house if your home is old enough to have lead paint in the soil. Your soil can be tested for lead.

Draw a plan giving each plant its required space - fill in with annuals at first.

Planting

Wear sunscreen and a hat!

When:

Fall planting is best for lawns, shrubs and perennials to give roots a good head start. The first week of October is usually optimal for planting. Spring planting is next best - after the soil is dry – about May 1 to May 15. Plant annuals and vegetables in May.

Soil Acidity:

Prepare the soil well or you're wasting your time. Do a soil test to see if your soil is overly acid or alkaline. Most plants prefer neutral soil, but there are exceptions. Lilacs like alkaline soil (spread some lime). Rhododendron, azaleas and most evergreens like acid soil (fertilize with fertilizer specifically for acid-loving plants. Some use oak leaves, some research says this is a myth.) A light top dressing of dried manure every spring both fertilizes and tends to bring soil in our area to neutral. Use a soil tester (at most garden centers). UConn Cooperative Extension Service also tests soil. They are at 1800 Asylum Ave (at Trout Brook in W. Hfd – opposite the UConn main parking lot).

Preparing the Bed:

There can be a lot of clay and rocks in the Kenyon Street soil. If it's a new bed, remove the grass or weeds first by digging down and under the grass and roots with a flat shovel or a sod cutter. You can also kill the grass/weeds first by smothering your patch with black plastic (garbage bags held by wire stakes or rocks over several weeks.) Compost the discarded grass. Turn soil to at least spade depth to get air in the soil – 18" is even better for an excellent start. For large areas, rent a rototiller. Spread 2-3" of compost on the top and dig or till it in. Smooth the top. Top dress with dry manure from the garden center and scratch it in. Use more manure if your soil is poor in nutrients or has more clay. With a lot of clay you will probably need to add sand and to enrich with compost regularly over several years. If you want to minimize weeds from germinating without harming plants, Preen has worked for me. Two inches of shredded pine bark mulch on top, after planting. The mulch shades the roots and helps retain moisture – and also keeps new weeds down. Keep the mulch from touching the actual plant. Check the bag label for more instructions on amounts.

Plant:

Dig a hole that will place your plant's soil level at the same level as your soil. Tamp the soil immediately around your plant to make sure the roots have good contact with the soil. When you buy the plant – ask how far apart they should be. For planting seeds, press a shovel handle into your prepared soil as a guide. Follow the directions on the package for spacing. You typically plant the seed with ½" or less of soil on top, pressing gently to make good contact with the soil. Seeds differ, but most come up in a week or two. You will plant more than you need, so you will thin the seedlings that become established.

Water:

Give your new plants or seeds a long drink with a gentle light spray. To check if you've watered enough, stick your finger in the soil to make sure the soil is wet to about 2" when first planting. Water again in half a week after first planting if the soil dries out and your plants are drooping. Thereafter you need 1" of water a week – from nature or the sprinkler. A 'V' shaped rain gauge is the most accurate measure – make sure your gauge isn't located under a tree canopy. The first time, use the rain gauge to time how long it takes your sprinkler to distribute 1" of water – then adjust, based on the amount of rain that week. On average we get about 1" a week here, but even most established plants will need water if a week and a half goes by in the summer heat without rain. Too much water will encourage fungus, and tends to kill most plants.

Maintenance

Fall:

- Weed thoroughly in fall to get a head start for next year.
- After hard frost, add organic mulch to help protect plants from the more frequent freeze and thaw cycles our climate is getting.
- Fertilize lawns, shrubs and perennials in December before the snow, but after plant growth has stopped. You will get a great burst of growth in spring.
- Specific Plants:
 - Cut clematis that bloom on new wood back to 18" each spring (or at least every 3 or 4 years). Clematis that blooms on either old or new wood should have dead wood removed and light pruning each year to keep some blooms at eye level - severely back to 18" after the first bloom to rejuvenate an old plant. (See WWF document to see varieties of each type)

Spring:

- Weed thoroughly in spring. Learn the difference between your plants and a weed.
- Top dressing of chicken manure each spring.
- Mulch (2" of shredded pine bark) each spring. Ongoing:
- Divide plants that are crowded (lightly trim tops and roots of both when dividing).
- Any areas that create standing water (which kill most plants) will need to be addressed: The addition of coarse sand or even gravel dug well down into open spots will help.
- Specific Plants:

Prune roses in spring. Transplant bearded iris in the fall, keeping them from being crowded by other perennials. Cut bearded iris back to 3-4" and remove spent foliage to discourage borers.

- For those who have Japanese beetles eating your roses - Doug reports great success by using this product in April (which also fertilizes):
[Spectracide: Systemic Rose & Flowering Shrub Insect Control + Fertilizer](#).

Ongoing Maintenance:

- Weed! Each time after it rains. Pull the weed out slowly when the ground is saturated, and you'll get the whole root. Dig the whole root out if it's too big. If too large to dig out, clip or lop it off and spray any leaf that emerges with a weed-specific spray. The leaf will take up the spray and kill the plant. Maintenance especially out front!
- Water: Ongoing water requirements: rule of thumb: about 1" a week of rain. Water only once a week to get your plants the 1" they need.
- Second Fertilizer – June 1: Only certain plants benefit from post-April fertilizer (like lilies, delphinium, roses). I like to give these a time release fertilizer like Osmakote between June 1 and June 15.
- Deadheading means twisting or clipping the dead flower off the plant as soon as it's gone. This encourages the plant to put its energy into growing bigger and more flowers. If you want to collect seeds to start for next year, leave a few dead flowers that will go to seed. Collect them in envelopes from the dried pod. Label the envelope so you know what's in there. Or just let the seeds drop and when they emerge in the spring, transplant them where you want them.

Every three years (or so):

- Prune dead branches and for esthetics.
- Divide most perennials every three years or so (and extend your garden or trade with others)



Quick Spring Start

(When your bed has been prepared)

Planting Day - May 10-20:

In your second year in a planting bed, you just need to turn the soil with a pitchfork and add manure. Don't turn soil in April - it's still winter-wet and will compact, ruining the planting year. The manure is both a fertilizer that generally makes your soil a neutral pH, and amends the soil a bit to make it lighter. Turning the soil with the full depth of the pitchfork breaks up the clods, turns up rocks, aerates it and pulls small weeds up and under the soil. Pull out any weeds that still have roots into the soil, and remove big clumps of weeds. Get any rocks out. This gets easier every year. If your soil isn't great, add 1-2" of compost and then turn the soil over, working the manure into the top couple of inches only.

Smooth the soil and plant seeds or plants the correct depth and distance from each other. Water each. (Mark the rows and thin out extra seedlings later if you plant seeds.) Choose plants for "full sun" if your spot gets 6-8 hrs of sun (usually on the south side without tree or tall shrub cover), with 4-6 hrs of sun (usually unfettered access on the east or west side), choose "partial sun" plants, with 4 hrs or less, choose "shade" plants. If your spot has root competition from trees or shallow-rooted shrubs, talk to the garden center for a few options. (See Garden Center tips, below).

When planting, many gardeners pinch back plants by about half if they are "leggy". This encourages them to grow more branches, making fat full plants with more blooms (Pinching is an anti-intuitive leap of faith, but it works). Cover with about 1.5" - 2" of shredded pine bark mulch to shade roots, retain moisture and keep the weeds from getting a strong foothold. Finally, give the bed a long, slow, deep watering. Hat, gloves, sunscreen - even on overcast days.....

Garden Center Tips:

Measure the # of sq. feet of the bed (length times width). Your garden center can show you where the plants for "full sun" are (all veggies and roses, most annuals, bulbs and perennials and many shrubs), "partial sun" (all spring bulbs, some annuals and perennials and most shrubs), or "shade" (try impatiens, begonias, coleus, fern, hostas, rock gardens). They can get you the correct bags for manure, compost and mulch for your amount of sq. ft. Go during the week in early eve - almost no one is there. The plant tags usually tell what amt. of sun, the height and the distance apart to plant. (Tall ones in the back, I like to pick color combinations that look great next to the house color if it's in front.) The bags give you the coverage in sq. ft, as well. Ask if your plant needs staking or a cage (many tomatoes, etc.).

After Planting:

Water once a week if it doesn't rain 1". Plants in pots need daily watering and a hole in the pot. Watering too much begets fungus. In mid to late June, sprinkle fertilizer (follow the label instructions). I use a time-release fertilizer. Weed right after it rains. (If you hold the whole weed and pull slowly, you'll get the roots easily when they're saturated.) If you plant shrubs or perennials you might fertilize again in early September. Rhododendrons and azaleas need acid fertilizer. That's about it. You will get more blooms if you pinch the blooms off right when they're faded and before they start to set seed, called "deadheading". Mildred lets some set seeds to plant next year. NOTE - saving seeds doesn't work with hybrid plants. Definitely deadhead hybrid plants that grow from seed easily, like Cone Flowers (Echinacea).

Enjoy June-Oct!! Clip and compost after the hard frost.