

# Gardening Tips From an Accidental Gardener

Keep it simple and enjoy your garden!



**Where, oh where shall my garden be?** 6 hours of full direct sunlight is the minimum required for garden plants; 10 hours - better, 12 hours - best. Shade cloth is very helpful in July & August and can extend the growing season in the same way frost cloth extends the season in colder months. Plants can't compromise well on sunlight, heat or cold! They are definitely middle of the road liberals!

**Beds, Pots, & Buckets, oh my!** I prefer raised beds - either framed or mounded. Lowe's will cut boards to your specs for framed beds. Pots, buckets, tubs - anything can be used. Plastic is my last choice - do they leach??? I'm not sure. Drainage holes are a must!

**There is no dirt in Florida!** Soil prep is a must! If you are gardening at the Arlington community garden at Tree Hill you will have excellent soil. Mulch Masters has a great mix in bags. To create a similar soil mix, I have used the FINE pine bark from the Arlington Ace Hardware; mix with Black Cow and organic soil - mix in near equal parts. Peat can also be added to help hold moisture. Compost: must be aged and made from a variety of products. Good research is your best bet to learn about the best methods for composting.

**PH Testing:** There are different reviews on home PH testing kits. Soil samples can be sent to the local extension office. Note that the turn around time can be several weeks. Plan ahead. With a small plot, regular fertilizing can usually overcome PH problems. If you opt to use lime be sure to study the methods carefully. Lime can be tricky.

**Feed them and they will grow:** Seaweed & Fish Emulsion. Follow label directions. 'nuff said.

**Thirsty plants:** Start with good soil first. I use the standard fine pine bark/black cow/ organic soil mix for most of my plants. For those plants that like a little more moisture - such as tomatoes, try adding a little more peat in that specific area. Otherwise, water deeply and less frequently. In this case - less is more. Train the roots of your plants to go deep for water and not spread out on the top of the soil. I find that critical in the Florida heat.

**Pest control:** A clean well kept garden is your best defense and time well spent. Remove damaged leaves & spent plants regularly without delay; do not let veggies rot on the plant and remove damaged fruit far away from your garden. Aphids, cut worms & stink bugs are a common problem. A 50/50 organic soap/water spray is helpful and can be used frequently. Organic products are readily available. I tend to have several different kinds and alternate use. Share with a fellow gardener to cut initial costs. Read labels carefully and follow-up with research. Manufactures can be creative with their descriptions of their products and FDA guidelines can be broad.



**Plant this not that!** Reliable seeds are important. Many catalogs are free and have a wealth of information. Johnny's Seeds catalog is an excellent "go to" source. Heirloom seeds, once hard to find are just a Google search away! My favorites:

Baker Creek Heirlooms      Johnny Seeds      Annies Heirlooms      Southern Exposure

Cheap seeds are really not cheaper - usually less in the pack of lesser quality. New seeds each year is not a must. Share your seeds for a larger variety and to cut costs. Plant recommended reliable... and then just for fun add something you've never had before. Malibar spinach???

**Organic seedlings???** Unlike eggs (if the chicken isn't organic the eggs won't be no matter what they're fed); Growth fertilizers & pesticides usually lose their residual effects by the time veggies form on the plant. It's a personal choice. If you have a 'Mart' store budget, choose smaller plants without fruit.

**Trads** on San Jose Blvd will have free gardening workshops beginning Saturday Oct. 1 at 10:00 am. Trads has excellent selection of veggies & free good advice. They do not usually have many seeds.

**Turner Ace Hardware, Arlington** is another favorite offering nice herbs & heirloom tomato plants.

**Riverside Arts Market** will have vendors that offer plants. And that's just a nice way to spend a Saturday morning!

There are many other places to purchase seeds and plants. I recommend purchasing tomato and pepper plants & cabbage family plants. Lettuces, carrots, radishes, squashes, cukes, and the like are easily started from seeds.

**It's all about roots!** The plant you choose is just as important as where you purchase them. As tempting as it may be... plants with flowers & particularly those that already have fruit are not necessarily my best choice. Lift the plant out of the pot and check the roots. Avoid any that are root bound... you'll see the roots forming a circular web around the plant. If it is the last plant available and you just have to have one... trim the roots to encourage new outward growth when planting. Peat pots are very common. I remove the plant from the pot, chop up the pot and mix it into the surrounding soil.

Don't forget the flowers!!! Marigolds can help with pest. Other varieties simply make a garden beautiful!

While I have spent many thoughtful hours alone in a garden, it is very rewarding to share your triumphs and successes with fellow gardeners. Share your seeds, share your experiences and share your bounty!



Happy Gardening!