The New Gardener's Handbook

White Flower Farm

PLANTSMEN SINCE 1950

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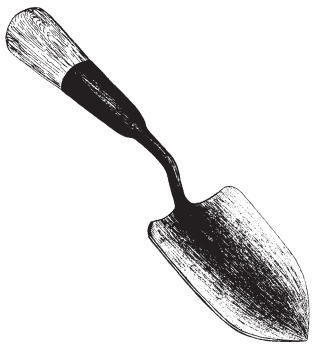
Introduction

Starting a first garden is exciting and fun, but it can also be a bit intimidating. While it's true that creating any new garden can be as easy as digging a few holes in the ground and popping in a couple of plants, your odds of succeeding and achieving a desirable result will improve markedly with some basic knowledge. Among the key components of successful gardening are choosing a favorable site, assessing its conditions, selecting the right plants for those conditions, and caring for plants properly so they may thrive.

In the following pages, we provide a broad overview of the essentials that will help you create and nurture a beautiful and successful garden. What we hope to encourage along the way is the habit of *seeing and thinking like a gardener*. While it may seem effortful at first to consider soil types, sun exposures, site conditions, and the properties of individual plants, it will gradually become second nature. You're looking for the right plants for the right place, and we'll give you the tools to find them.



How To Evaluate Your Garden Site

Before choosing which plants or preplanned gardens to purchase, assess the site where they are to be planted. No amount of loving a plant and wishing it to grow well can help it overcome conditions it does not like. A Hosta planted in full sun may hang in there (especially if given enough water), but its leaves will burn and it will pine for the shadier areas it prefers. You can plant Salvias in boggy soil, but they will generally succumb to root rot. If you want a plant to thrive and be all it can be, give it the conditions it likes. Here's how you go about determining what those are:

Know Your Hardiness Zone

The first order of business when selecting any plant for a garden is to know if it is hardy in your area. So-called "hardiness zones" are assigned by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which uses average low temperature readings to map temperature ranges across the continent.

USDA hardiness zones range from 1 (coldest) to 13 (warmest). For greater accuracy, each is further divided into "A" and "B," with A being colder than B. A single state—and even a town—may have different hardiness zones due to elevation or proximity to water. (Please note: On our website, we list plant hardiness zones as whole numbers, which include both "A" and "B.")

Finding your hardiness zone is as easy as visiting our home page at **WhiteFlowerFarm.com**. We rate zones broadly by zip code. In the *Find Hardiness Zone* box near the top, enter your zip code and click 'lookup.' Our site will identify your zone and flag plants on our website that are hardy in your area, differentiating between southern and western zones (ex: Zone 4-8S/9W). It will also let you know when a chosen plant is out of your zone. (Gardeners living at high elevation should consider themselves in one zone colder than indicated.)

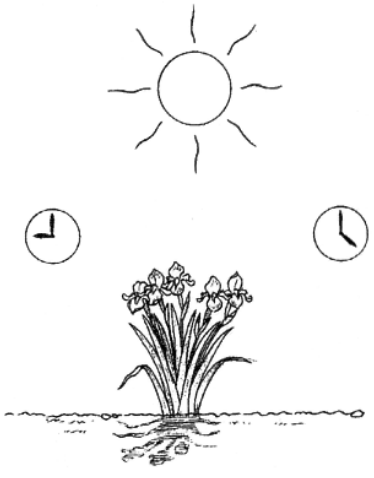
You may also find your hardiness zone by looking at the color-coded *USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map* maintained by the USDA and plugging in your zip code. You will find the map at **https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov**. Using the map's zooming features, you can even locate your specific street. (This feature is especially useful if you live in a region with complex climatic conditions such as the Pacific Coast, the Southeastern Coastal Plain, or near or in any mountain range.)

Sun Exposure

The number of hours of direct or indirect sunlight your garden receives in the course of a day is key to determining which plants will grow well there. Essentially, there are three types of sun exposure:

- **Full Sun:** 6 or more hours of direct sun per day
- **Part Shade** (also referred to as **Part Sun**): 3 to 4 hours of direct sun per day (Note that the hours of sunlight may be sequential, such as noon to 4 p.m., or they might be 2 hours in the morning followed by 2 hours later in the day)
- **Full Shade**: Little to no direct sunlight per day with indirect or filtered light (such as the dappled sunlight that filters through an overhead canopy of leaves)

In addition to understanding these gradients, it's important to keep in mind that the intensity of sunlight varies by season, time of day, and in different parts of the country and different spots in a single backyard. Afternoon sun is hotter than morning sun, and a full-sun part of the yard can be thrown into deep shade when deciduous trees leaf out overhead in spring. Full sun in parts of the South, Southwest, or at high altitudes is likely to be far more intense than full sun in New England. Likewise, a garden bed on the south side of a white-painted house or garage will be subject to reflected heat and light that may make the quality of exposure more intense than it would be in other parts of the same yard. So before you choose a site for your garden, take the time to watch various areas in your yard and observe the hours of direct sun per day and the quality of that sunlight. There are plants that will thrive in every type of exposure. Knowing how the sunlight plays in various parts of your yard will help you choose plants suited to the conditions you have.



Soil Type

A leading garden designer we know keeps a sign on her desk that says: "It's the soil, Stupid." The sign serves as a reminder that soil composition is critical to plant health and viability. Knowing what type of soil you have in your garden is essential to choosing the plants that will thrive in it. Soil science is a boundless study with university courses and textbooks devoted to the subject. Here, we are providing only the most basic overview to help inspire you to consider the importance of soil before and after planting.

What is soil? It is an essential natural resource that contains and fosters life. Soil is a naturally occurring blend of particles from rocks and minerals; nutritious, water-absorbing humus (which is defined as decomposed organic matter from plants and animals); water; and air. Soil varies widely by type, and the type (or types) you have in your garden will depend on the proportions of these ingredients. Healthy soil is alive with innumerable diverse life forms, both microscopic and visible, forming the soil food web.
(Visit **https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soil_food_web**)

In broad terms, soil may be broken down into three main types defined by texture, or particle size:

- **Sand**: Sandy soil is coarse-grained and highly porous due to its dearth of organic matter. Hold a handful of sandy soil and watch as it slips through your fingers.
- **Silt**: Silty soil is fine in texture with particles that are larger than clay but smaller than sand. It has roughly the consistency of flour.
- **Clay**: Clay soil is heavy and airless, and it compacts easily. Drainage is extremely poor. If you make a fist around a handful of clay soil, the lump will form a ball.

The soil in most gardens is a mix of all three of these elements—sand, silt, and clay—but it's the proportions that count. Plants in straight sand may succumb to thirst because water drains through it quickly, while those in silt or clay may drown or suffocate. Most gardeners aim for a blend of soil types that, in its ideal proportions, is called *loam*. Many compare loam to a sponge. It's airy and light but capable of retaining moisture but not too much. In gardener's speak, this is considered the best soil, but not all of us have it. Amending soil by adding compost, fertilizer, mulch, and other additives may help build and nourish the earth, thereby supporting and feeding the plants grown in it, but there are limits. The soil you have, no matter what you add to it, is the soil you should work with if you want your plants and your garden to reach their full potential. Rest assured that Nature has supplied gardeners with plants that grow in almost all types of soil and circumstances so the challenge is first knowing what type of soil you have then selecting plants that will thrive in it.

Soil Testing

Testing your garden soil is not a requirement (some of us at the farm have never done it in our home gardens, while others swear by it) but doing so can provide a wealth of useful information.

The best way to have your soil tested is to contact your local extension service. You will be given simple steps that require submitting a soil sample and waiting for results.

Having your soil tested is a good way to know what type of soil you have, what its pH is (how acidic, alkaline, or neutral), the percentage of organic matter, and more. Essential nutrients (calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, and potassium) will be graphed, letting you know if your soil is deficient of any or if any levels are excessive. Amounts of important trace elements will also be listed. A soil test tells you whether you need any fertilizer and, if you do, which specific mineral to apply based on what you plan to grow in that particular site. We urge you to test your soil before adding fertilizer because any elements that are in excess of what plants can take up will run off and pollute local waters. (Phosphorous runoff is a common and serious cause of water pollution. Many states also test soil for lead levels, which is especially important if you live in an old house that may have leached lead paint into the ground and you plan to grow food or garden with children.)

Soil pH

The abbreviation pH, or "potential of hydrogen," is a measurement of the concentration of hydrogen ions in a substance, which in turn defines its acidity or alkalinity. Soil pH ultimately determines the availability of nutrients for uptake by plant roots and, therefore, directly affects a plant's ability to thrive.

The pH scale ranges from 0.0 to 14.0, in which anything below 7.0 is acidic and anything above 7.0 is alkaline (or basic). A measurement of 7.0 is considered neutral. Most soils exhibit a pH range between 4.0 and 8.0.

Nature has given gardeners plants that will thrive at nearly every pH level. Some tolerate acidic, neutral, or alkaline soils, some manage quite well in all three, and others require a narrow pH range. The majority of plants tolerate a range on either side of neutral. Few plants tolerate very acidic soil (<5.0 pH), although some require it.

- Among the plants that like acidic soils are: Azalea, Blueberry, Fothergilla, Mountain Laurel, Rhododendron, and Wintergreen.
- Among the plants that like alkaline ("sweet") soils are: Boxwood, Clematis, Dianthus, Hellebore, and Lilac.

The tolerance of plants to varying degrees of pH is an important factor when choosing varieties for specific sites. While it is possible to amend the pH of soil (see below), it is difficult to make permanent change. We recommend testing your soil pH and, once it is known, making thoughtful plant choices before trying to change it.

It is also important to note that many of us live in increasingly built-up or urban environments. The soils in our gardens are often near foundations, sidewalks, or paved areas. Due to the limestone in concrete and other building materials, these soils tend to have a higher (more alkaline) pH. Proper plant selection is critical to getting plants to succeed in these areas.

Amending Soil pH

Sometimes it is desirable, even necessary, to change the pH of your soil. (Many of our customers ask us about altering soil pH to change the blossom color of pH-susceptible Hydrangeas.) In general, add lime to raise the pH (make it more alkaline) or sulfur to lower the pH (make it more acidic). It is important to consider the various forms of chemical additives available and to apply them strictly according to package instructions. Compost will nudge soil pH, whether acidic or alkaline, closer to neutral as well as improve soil structure and biology. For small sites, it may be possible to remove the existing soil completely and replace it with a new mix. But as noted above, it remains difficult to make a permanent change to the pH of your soil. The conditions that made your soil acidic or alkaline in the first place, such as bedrock weathering or proximity to limestone-rich building materials, cannot be continually managed through soil amendments. Selecting plants that grow well at your soil's existing pH, or that will tolerate a broad pH range, is far easier.

Drainage & Moisture Levels

The average quantity of water received by a particular site and the way water moves through the soil there will have a critical impact on the plants selected for that spot.

For starters, keep in mind the general moisture level in your part of the world. Do you live in a region that tends to be dry, wet, or somewhere in between? Is rain scant or frequent? If scant, are you willing to water your garden? Is water available or are there likely to be local restrictions during times of drought? In your own backyard, begin to take note of how water drains, travels, or pools in various areas. Are there boggy spots where puddles persist after a rainstorm? Are there areas where water drains quickly and which tend to dry out sooner? Store these tidbits of knowledge in your mind (or in a notebook) because they are another key to helping you make the best plant choices for your garden. Some plants thrive with what gardeners like to call "wet feet." For others, damp roots are a recipe for rot, which will eventually kill many plants. When it comes to moisture levels and drainage, know the preferences of individual plants and plant them in places that will give them the level of hydration they need to thrive.

Microclimates

A particular site's exposure to wind, rain, snow, temperature variations, and other factors may mean its climatic conditions are distinctly different from those in the areas that surround it. These differentiated sites are called "microclimates."

In your yard, you may notice a sunny spot by a stone wall where snow melts earliest. Or perhaps one area is shady and damp with mosses growing, while another remains high and dry. Your house or another structure may create a protected nook in an otherwise windy location. Cold air moves downhill, creating cold pockets, where frost comes earlier and stays longer. These are all microclimates, small areas that are somewhat different from the overall climate.

Paying attention to the microclimates in your yard can let you extend your season of bloom and grow plants that might only be suitable for those very special spots.

Caring for Your Garden

In our *Quick Start Guide* for beginner gardeners and in the Growing Guides we offer for particular gardens and plants, we use a variety of terms in regard to tending a garden. From watering and mulching to composting and fertilizing, many of these terms are defined below.

Watering

Immediately after you plant your new perennials, water them well to settle the soil around them, eliminate any air pockets, and refresh them with a nice drink. In the weeks and months that follow, hydration will be key to helping your plants become successfully established. Pay attention to how wet or dry the soil is—you don't want the plants to dry out entirely, but they will suffer if they are in constantly wet soil.

The best way to assess the moisture level in your soil is to stick your finger in it to a depth of 1". If the soil feels moist, do not water until it feels somewhat dry. The general rule is that new plants need approximately 1" of water per week, whether it's supplied by Mother Nature or you.

Once your plants are established, they will need watering only during periods of prolonged drought (i.e., no rain for several weeks). If possible, avoid overhead irrigation. It is best practice to water plants at the soil level, which means wetting the ground *around* them but not spraying directly on or at them. Water on leaves, especially when sitting on them overnight, can promote fungus and disease. Another important rule of successful hydration is to *water plants deeply and infrequently*. Why? Watering daily or too frequently in small amounts encourages plants to produce surface roots, which cannot reach soil moisture during dry spells. Watering deeply and infrequently encourages deep roots that draw upon moisture in the soil, making plants more resilient when rain is scarce and less likely to need supplemental watering.

Mulching

Mulching is the practice of spreading a layer of organic matter such as shredded bark, wood chips, dried Pine needles (also sometimes called Pine straw), or grass clippings around the plants in your garden. Cocoa bean shells, buckwheat hulls, or other byproducts can also be good options. Mulch serves many purposes. It reduces weed seed germination, creates shade over plant roots, regulates soil temperature, preserves moisture in the soil, and can add aesthetic appeal. As organic mulch materials decompose, soil fertility and structure are improved.

Mulch is generally applied in spring, after the soil has warmed somewhat, perennial plants have emerged, and annuals have been planted. Sometimes a touch-up application is needed mid-season or in late autumn. In colder climates, mulch evens out temperature swings, which helps to prevent frost heaving. For best results, keep mulch away from plant stems, trunks, or crowns. (Mulch *around* the plants, not on top of them. This helps to avoid smothering them and discourages fungal diseases.)

Mulch may be purchased in bulk from local nurseries or distributors. It is also available in bags at garden centers, hardware stores, and big box stores. It pays to choose a reliable brand. Inferior labels may contain weed seeds or invasive plant rhizomes or ground-up construction debris that can include chemicals or heavy metals that may be harmful to plants, people, or wildlife. Look for a brand that offers undyed mulch made from natural ingredients. Dyed mulches may cost more, but that doesn't mean they are better. There is some evidence that dyes leach into the soil, adversely affecting soil chemistry and beneficial microbes, even plants. But it is the wood itself—recycled scrap lumber of unknown origin that can contain toxic materials—that is of more concern. For another alternative, consider creating mulch from organic matter you find in your own backyard. Autumn leaves, Pine needles, and wood chips from downed trees all make terrific mulch. Repurposing them in your garden spares you the trouble of disposing of them as yard waste. Pea stone or small-sized gravel can also be an attractive and effective mulch, especially for plants such as Lavender that grow best in sunny, dry conditions and resent moisture on their leaves.

Composting

Composting is a ritual for most experienced gardeners who rely on it to add organic nutrients and beneficial microbes to the soil and help condition it. Compost is dark in color and crumbly in texture. It is a nutrient-rich blend created from dry, carbon-rich "browns" and moist, nitrogen-rich "greens." Brown carbonaceous materials include dried leaves, sawdust, wood chips, straw, and shredded paper. Nitrogenous "greens" aren't necessarily that color. They include fruit and vegetable scraps, grass clippings, seed-free weeds, spent flowers, and other green garden waste, rotted manure, and coffee grounds. These organic components are gathered in a pile outdoors, ideally in alternating layers, and either left to decay naturally over time or periodically turned to speed up the process of transforming it into what many like to call "black gold." Compost *feeds the soil* naturally and organically, which, in turn, nourishes garden plants. Gardeners who add compost to their gardens usually do not need fertilizers.

Commercially produced compost is available in bulk or in bags at garden centers, hardware stores, and big box stores. But composting at home is a great way to turn yard waste into a valuable resource. Whether you just make a pile in a corner somewhere, build a three-part bin (with compartments for fresh materials, those that are "cooking," and one for "ready" compost), or use a closed manufactured plastic product, whatever you can produce at home will reduce your yard waste and enrich the soil in your garden.

For more information about composting, visit **whiteflowerfarm.com/how-to-compost**.

Fertilizing

We do not recommend fertilizing plants at the time of planting. Doing so can negatively impact a plant's proper development by spurring top growth before the roots can support that growth. Also, fertilizer can burn tender roots. Nurturing a landscape or ornamental garden is not like growing high-production crops. You don't need to *make* your plants grow; in Nature they do it without our help. Instead, we hope you and all new gardeners will employ best practices when it comes to using fertilizer: In lieu of feeding individual plants (despite urging from "green industry" chemical fertilizer and lawn treatment advertising), think in terms of *feeding the soil* which, in turn, will nourish your plants naturally. It's easy: After your perennials have had a year to settle into the garden, apply 1-2" of organic matter, such as compost or well-rotted manure, around the base of the plants in early spring. This should take care of their nutritional needs. Often no additional fertilizing will be necessary.

Should your soil test indicate nutrient deficiencies, or if you are growing plants that are especially heavy feeders and you choose to fertilize, we urge you to use mineral-based, slow-acting organic fertilizers (look for the OMRI seal of approval on the bag). Only apply what is needed, which is sometimes a single element (available separately), rather than a general purpose mix. Fast-acting, water-soluble synthetic fertilizers give plants a quick boost due to high nitrogen and phosphorous content, but those elements leach into waterways, contributing to algae blooms. Synthetic fertilizers add harmful salts to the soil, can compromise soil biology, burn plants if used in excess, and require large energy inputs to produce.

Managing Pests & Diseases

It's important to know that plants are most susceptible to disease when they are faced with stressful conditions. Eliminate the stress for your plants by providing them with what they need: their preferred sun exposure and soil type, proper watering, and good drainage and fertility. Encourage beneficial insects by planting lots of flowers and avoiding 'cides (pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides). The "good" bugs will do much to control pests.

Promoting Reflowering

Deadheading is the process of removing spent blossoms to encourage the formation of additional flowers, not to mention to prevent unwanted seedlings and/or improve the appearance of your plant. [See individual plant information for specifics about deadheading the plants in your *Start a Garden* collection.].

Dividing & Transplanting

Allow your plants to fill out for a few years. It's okay to let them touch and grow together. But if plants begin to appear crowded, which can impede air circulation and force them to compete for resources, or if you simply want to establish more of them elsewhere, you may want to divide clumps. Division is best done in early spring or fall when temperatures are most likely to be mild. (The higher heat of summer can stress plants, making division and transplantation a bit more perilous.) To divide your plant, use a shovel to dig up a section of it or the entire plant. Using the blade of the shovel, a knife, or a saw, depending on the plant, chop the crown of the plant into sections. Or, if the divisions are just tangled and separate easily, simply tease them apart. Transplant the divisions to new areas of your garden, use them to fill in any gaps, or share with friends and family.

Design Tips

In general, a design is any organized, purposeful arrangement of plants and garden accents that pleases the gardener. It's your garden, so please yourself. That said, one of the things that distinguishes great gardens from less impactful ones is a designer's ability to create successful plant combinations. Sometimes this means fostering attractive plant communities—mixing a multitude of varieties together to form a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. But minimalist gardens, which may feature a single specimen or a limited plant palette combined with structures or vistas, can also achieve striking effects. Whatever your garden style, there are a few general guidelines that serve all designers, from novices to the most experienced among us.

Choose a Color Palette

Few things unify a garden as clearly as a well-defined color palette. Think about the colors you like most and combine them in your borders. Are you partial to lavender-blues, pale pinks, and pastel yellows? Maybe you lean toward hot, bold oranges, yellows, and reds? Perhaps you prefer classic moon garden shades of white, silver, and green? Color combinations are limitless, but by defining and sticking to a palette, you give your garden a cohesive look that adds significantly to its artfulness and appeal.

As your knowledge of plants and their blossom times increases, you may find yourself creating different color palettes for different phases of the growing season. The yellow Daffodils and pink Tulips of spring may yield to the blazing orange Tithonias and red hot Canna Lilies of summer then the burgundy Heleniums and golden Solidagos of autumn. Different areas in your yard present opportunities to play with different color schemes. Some gardeners conceive of their garden as a full season symphony, and they carefully and deliberately orchestrate a sequence of crescendos so that particular plants or plant combinations come to the fore as others subside, with one garden "moment" segueing into another.

Always keep in mind that flowers aren't the only way to add color to your garden. Nature provides gardeners with a wide array of foliage plants that add distinctive accents to borders and beds in a range of colors that can span from vivid red to silver, yellow, nearly black, and every shade of green imaginable (celadon, chartreuse, emerald, forest, sage, and so on).

Remember to make the most of contrasting or complementary colors. Nothing makes green foliage look greener than the red-leaf plant you put next to it. Experiment with tone-on-tone gradations to create soothing, painterly scapes—a mass of dark purple spires (such as *Salvia* 'Caradonna') shifting to a drift of paler, lavender-purple blooms (perhaps *Nepeta* 'Walker's Low') then onto white (maybe in the form of a Veronica, Balloon Flower, or Delphinium) creates a calming sight that draws the eye onward.

Vary the Shapes

The wide world of flora features plants that grow in a boundless variety of forms, also called "habits." From mounds of all sizes to spikes that stand vertically to vines that cascade or climb to create fountain-like sprays, use varied shapes to create interest and excitement. Pair mounding forms with upright, spiky, or vase-shaped growers. Situate the vertical, bicolor blades of *Iris* 'Variegata Aurea' near the mounding form of *Nepeta* 'Walker's Low' and adjacent to the velvety, broad foliage of Lamb's Ears (*Stachys byzantina* 'Big Ears'). Plant *Brunnera* 'Jack Frost,' with its mounding form and distinctive heart-shaped leaves, in front of the slender, chartreuse-colored blades of Japanese Forest Grass (*Hakonechloa macra* 'All Gold') and beside the arching, ladderlike fronds of a Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*).

The forms of flowers also vary widely—from the cone-shaped panicles, mopheads, or lacy blossoms of various Hydrangeas to the multi-layered blooms of many Peonies and Roses to the sunny faces of Daisies and Coneflowers, with ray-petals encircling a central button or cone. Position plants to make the most of Nature's variety show, enhancing each plant through its proximity to well-chosen neighbors. By orchestrating these details, and through all of these decisions large and small, your garden develops style and personality.

Be Mindful of Scale & Proportion

Scale and proportion are fundamental to good design. If you're planting a garden located in front of a three-story house, you're going to need larger plants and a wider bed than you would near a small shed. A couple of Petunias or Impatiens in a narrow strip will have little presence or impact. Scale your plantings up or down to suit the size of their surroundings. Within each garden bed, factor in the *mature* sizes of the specimens you are planting and be sure to vary heights, mixing tall, medium, and short or ground-covering plants to create a garden that has interest at multiple levels. Small trees and shrubs add important structure, mass, and an opportunity to plant in layers. (The mature height of each plant and the spacing it requires to spread laterally is printed on the tag that comes with each plant. The information also appears on the product page for each plant on our website.)

Layer & Interweave Your Plantings

One of the great temptations for first-time gardeners is to plant their new charges in a straight line, setting them up like soldiers. But Mother Nature does not plant in even rows, and that orderly aesthetic is best left to agricultural pursuits. To create a more natural, more graceful, and less regimented effect in your garden, be sure to layer plants of different heights, plant them in drifts rather than lining them up along the edge of a bed, and stagger and interweave them. As you site each one, keep its *mature* size in mind and make sure to leave room for growth.

Plant in Groups

To achieve an intentional look that conveys a sense of design and harmony, learn to plant in groups. Many garden designers advocate clustering "like" plants, say, a single variety of Astilbe or Coreopsis, in groups of 3s and 5s to create drifts of color and a sense of mass. You might also consider creating a combination of three or five different perennials and repeating that combo along a border or pathway, perhaps in different sized groups. These masses and thematic repetitions, whether formally arranged or loosely sprinkled throughout, create a sense of cohesiveness in any garden.

It should be noted that most of the *Start a Garden* collections contain just one plant of each type. The idea is to keep the price point down for beginners and also invite you to try an array of plants to see which you like most and which perform best in your garden. As your garden grows, create a sense of unity by adding more of the individual varieties you like best or repeating the entire collection, should space allow.

Support Habitat & Sustainability

As you learn and grow with your garden, we urge you to choose plants that create habitat for wildlife and also to take a sustainable approach to gardening. Birds, bees, butterflies, and other creatures are not only essential for biodiversity and species survival; they add beauty and life to gardens of all sizes. Nothing defines the success of a garden better than bees and hummingbirds buzzing, songbirds singing, crickets chirping, and Monarchs and other butterflies flitting from flower to flower. By choosing plants that provide winged friends and other wildlife with food and shelter, you welcome these essential creatures to your garden and enjoy their company while doing what is good for the planet.

Plant for All Seasons

As you gain experience as a gardener, you will begin to appreciate the beauty of plants in all their details—the colors and textures of flowers, foliage, seed pods, and bark, and their striking silhouettes. Ideally, any garden will have something of interest in each of the "moments" that make up the gardening season—from the first green shoots in springtime to the evergreens, bright berries, and dry grasses that are dusted in snow in winter. Over time, you will develop a feel for the conditions of your site. You will begin to play with new plants and combinations for a beautiful sequence of bloom and notice which plants keep their good looks even in the "off season." When that happens, you are on your way to practicing the art of planting for all seasons and creating a garden that delights year-round.

Ready, Set, Grow

We hope the materials in this handbook and your *Start a Garden* collection are the beginning of a lifelong adventure in the world of gardening. We encourage you to talk to fellow gardeners, visit public and private gardens, read about plants and gardens, and look at photos. They are among the best ways to learn about plants and pick up tips for combining them in your garden.

Watch the plants in your *Start a Garden* collection develop, then add to them. Choose from our suggested list of Related Items for each garden (on the product page for each *Start a Garden*) or select something you might have seen on a garden visit or in a photograph (always keeping in mind each plant's preferences and determining whether or not your garden can supply them). Try new plants and see how they develop. Keep a notebook and take cell phone photos to maintain a helpful record of how your plants are growing and what they look like at various stages.

Whenever you could use a bit of coaching or as questions arise, we are here when you need us. Our friendly and experienced staff is available by phone during working hours. We are always delighted to talk with new gardeners.

You're now ready to begin, and we can't wait to hear how you and your garden grow!