

Presented by Alyssa Ford Morel January 19, 2024

### Tip: You Can Be Successful

- With the right amounts of water and sun and enough mulch to improve the soil, most plants will grow.
- If a plant is failing or prone to insects, it is probably in the wrong place.
- Beginner's luck can carry you a long way.

### Tip: Do a Soil Test

- Test the soil to learn the pH and what nutrients are present.
- Fertilize only based on soil test results, avoiding nutrient run-off and water pollution. The results will give specific recommendations.
- Recommendations vary depending on goal. Do separate tests for separate purposes.
- Don't be afraid of the codes.
- Soil tests are available from plant clinics and the Extension Office at the Fairlington Extension Office.
- Put dry soil in an airtight baggy and flatten out for easier mailing.

### Tip: Learn to Share Your Yard With Other Creatures

- "Most insects are good."
- Animals don't read maps.
- If nothing is eating your garden, it's not part of the ecosystem.
- Practice Doug Tallamy's "Ten Foot Rule."

### Tip: Be Safe

- Wear gloves and eye protection.
- Make sure you have your tetanus shot up to date.
  - Tetanus bacteria is commonly found in soil.
  - About a third of tetanus infections occur while gardening.
  - Tetanus boosters are needed every 10 years.

### Tip: Dig the Right Hole and Plant Well

- Loosen the root ball so roots aren't tight. You may have to cut some roots.
- Dig after modest rain so the soil is not too hard.
- Holes should be three to five times wider than the root ball, and slightly less the height.
- Don't amend the soil. Backfill with the soil you dug out. This encourages your new plants to grow their roots into the soil you've got.
- The soil should come to the same level as the soil in the pot. Err on the side of the plant being a little too high rather than too low.
- Place some rocks around small plants to keep critters from digging plants up.



### Tip: Take Care of Your Tools

- Keep your tools clean. Keep a sturdy wire brush handy for scouring/removing caked-on dirt.
- Keep a bin filled with builder's sand - shove your tools up and down in the sand to clean them.
- Add lightweight car oil to the sand to oil your tools while you clean them. Mineral oil is a good alternative.
- Use a diamond blade sharpener.

### Tip: Know How Much Sun You Have

- Afternoon sun is sun, afternoon shade is shade.
- Most sun-loving plants won't die in the shade, but may grow more leggy and pale, and won't set flowers or fruit as well as in the sun.
- Most tomatoes need at least eight hours of sun for good fruit-set.
- Most roses need at least six hours of sun for good bloom, but some varieties can take less.

### Tip: Climate Change is Here

- The USDA updated its Plant Hardiness Zone Map at the end of 2023. Most of the U.S. is now a half-zone warmer. The map is available at <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>.
- Try using plants from ½ to 1 zone warmer that tolerate drought and saturation.
- Be prepared for more unexpected weather including:
  - Flash floods (Plant more trees, thirsty shrubs and native grasses).
  - Flash droughts (Water as needed, even trees).
  - Unseasonably cool or warm days in the wrong season (Check forecasts).
- For more info, watch Elaine Mills' excellent talk at <https://mgnv.org/mg-virtual-classroom/sl-class-video/climate-conscious-2020> or watch Elizabeth Collaton and Thayer Long's short videos at <https://mgnv.org/mg-virtual-classroom/glencarlyn-videos/best-practices/>.

### Tip: Gardens Grow

- Gardens are supposed to change.
- Remove the term "garden maintenance" from your vocabulary since a garden is dynamic and meant to change. Go along for the ride and enjoy it. Let the plants speak to you as they grow where they want to grow. Less need for absolute control equals greater pleasure.

### Tip: Always Plan for the Full Size of Your Plant

- Look at both height and width of mature plant and plan for it.

### Tip: Garden Design

- Think about how you will access the garden and who else will use it.
- “Not every shrub should be sheared to a square or a green meatball. We want groups of plant friends, not lines of soldiers.”
- Bring shrubs away from the foundation. Have a bed at least the depth of the height of your first floor.
- If your house and yard have straight edges, add some curves in your beds.
- Are there places to sit?
- Plant in odd-numbered groups.
- To attract pollinators, plants in groups that make an impact when blooming.
- A list of local, native-specialist pros is available at the Plant NOVA Natives website.

### Tip: There’s a Difference Between Roots Grown in Water and Roots Grown in Soil

- Roots grow based on their medium, and the characteristics they develop don’t always translate well from one medium to another.
- If you want a cutting to grow in soil, plant it there in the first place.
- If you need to hold a cutting for a day or two, certainly put it in water so it doesn’t dry out, but plant it in soil as soon as possible.

### Tip: Hand Pull Your Weeds

- “Hand pulling weeds is therapeutic. Pull them when they are small. Grow more plants to cover the soil.”
- Hand pulling weeds, either with or without a tool, helps you get to know your soil, the creatures on and in it, and is both effective and satisfying.

### Tip: Seeds Are Not Scary

- Most seeds must touch earth to germinate, so pull mulch away from the base of a plant you want to reseed so seeds can contact soil.
- Plants that will benefit from this include Monarda, Columbine, Sweet Alyssum, Rose Campion, Cosmos, Amaranthus, Calendula, Violets, Zinnia, Coreopsis, Melampodium, Nigella, Portulaca.
- Try starting more plants from seed.
- Seeds are very affordable.
- You can get more variety from seed than from started plants.
- You can often save seeds from favorite plants.
- The Glencarlyn Library Garden has introduced a Seed Library for users to both take and give seeds. More information is available at: <https://mgnv.org/demo-gardens/glencarlyn/glencarlyn-library-community-garden-seed-library/>



### Tip: The Right Clothes Make a Difference

- Find pants with pockets for kneeling pads
- Find lightweight, breathable shirts that cover your skin.
- Find clothes with many pockets.
- For more recommendations, check out: <https://mgnv.org/mg-in-the-garden/emgs-share-their-favorite-tools/>

### Tips: Containers, from Anne Reed

- Clean out your old pots before spring. (Wretched relics from last year may have overwintered there.)
- Match the pot to the plant roots - some have long roots, others short.
- Watch out for overwatering - use a moisture meter, your finger, etc.
- If you've got a small space, consider using a caddy to move your plant to sun or shade - it actually works!
- Know the pros and cons of container types and how it can impact a plant's health.
- Beware self-watering containers that can collect salt residue.
- You can reuse last year's soil knowing that nutrients have washed away due to watering. Inspect for critters, add compost, refresh with a third of new potting mix, blend well, and voila!

### Tips: Containers, the Sequel

- Never plant in a pot with no hole.
- Don't get fancy at the bottom of the pot.
- Watch out for moisture-grabbing polymers, which may grab moisture from fine roots of the plant.
- Use the "Thriller, Filler, Spiller" rule for a nicely balanced mixture.
- Group pots together for more impact.
- It's OK to use a pot in a bed, especially to contain an aggressive grower.

### Tip: Water Wisely

- Plants need on average an inch of water a week.
- Watering is best in the morning, because the drops on the leaves will evaporate and not cause fungal growth overnight.
- Plants need extra water until they are established - one year for perennials, two years for shrubs, and three years for trees.
- Water pots until the water comes out the hole at the bottom.
- It's better to water more deeply and less frequently than vice versa. (Consider soaker/drip hoses instead of overhead watering.)



### Trick: Improve Your Soil

- Improve soil all the time
- Use compost or mulch for soil conditioning. Use plants as green mulch.
- Keep mulch a few inches away from trunks of shrubs and trees.
- Leave a little bare soil for ground-nesting bees.
- Use leaves as mulch.
- “Don’t throw away your leaves in the fall and then buy mulch! Nature’s mulch is more nutritious and free.”
- To avoid disposing of insects overwintering in leaves, don’t “clean them up” until there have been five consecutive days over 50 degrees.
- Try composting right into the ground. Dig in kitchen waste, cover with leaves, turn the whole bunch every few weeks.
- Use old Halloween hay bales on garden paths or as mulch for summer and incorporate into the soil.

### Trick: How to Find Reliable Information

- Use “site:edu” or “site:gov” at the end of your search term.
- Many gardening “hacks” are iffy at best, and often more work than doing things the conventional way.

### Trick: Dealing with Black Walnuts

- Black Walnuts have Juglone, an organic compound, that is growth-stunting to many types of plants.
- Juglone is in the leaves and nuts in addition to roots. Clean up and you may be able to grow more than you think.
- Try a raised bed to lift plants above the Black Walnut roots.
- Improve soil drainage with organic matter.
- Plants that are tolerant of Juglone include: native trees such as Serviceberry, Pawpaw, Redbud, Fringetree, Dogwood, Arborvitae; native shrubs such as Blackhaw and Maple-leaf Viburnum, Witchhazel, Spicebush, Elderberry; native vines such as Clematis, Virginia Creeper; Food crops such as Onions, Beets, Squash and Melons, Carrots, Parsnips, Beans, Corn; native perennials such as Yarrow, Asters, Lobelias, Virginia Bluebells, Bee Balm, Spring Beauty, Phlox, Solomon’s Seal, and Spiderwort; also Hosta, Iris, Daffodils, Chrysanthemums, and more! (PennState Extension)

### Trick: Smother Your Grass

- Twelve inches of arborists chips will kill almost anything and eventually create a great bed full of organic matter
- You can turn lawn or a weedy area into a ready-to plant bed by covering the area with layers of overlapping newspaper, cardboard or heavy craft paper, then topping with several inches of mulch for a minimum of six weeks.

- Use only non-glossy paper. Remove tape from cardboard.
- When ready, dig holes through the mulch and paper and plant.
- Suppresses the seed bank.

### Trick: Keeping Herbicide on the Weeds

- Identify weeds first, and determine best control method. Use an appropriate herbicide and only if other methods of control are ineffective. Follow label instructions carefully.
- Use a cut piece of PVC to keep spray contained.
- Let a vine grow up a stake then brush onto elevated leaves on stake.
- Use newspaper under a vine and brush herbicide on with a paintbrush.
- Use latex glove covered with an old knit glove and dip a forefinger and thumb. Carefully touch targeted leaves.

### Trick: Try the “Chelsea Chop”

- Many summer and fall blooming perennials can be cut back while growing in order to encourage more branching, creating fuller, shorter blooms.
- The name “Chelsea Chop” is a British term referring to making a cut in May at the same time as the annual Chelsea Garden Show in late May, but cuts (including multiple cuts) can be made up until the beginning of July.
- Cut between a half and a third of growth each time.
- You may want to cut the front of the bed more than the back in order to create different height blooms.
- Plants that benefit from cutting back include Phlox, Asters, Rudbeckias, Chrysanthemums, Goldenrod, Ironweed, Joe Pye, Sedum, Nepeta, Yarrow, Marguerites, Shasta daisies, Penstemon.
- Link to video: <https://youtu.be/pbe7UpVUTlg>

### Trick: How to Keep Track of Your Tools

- Paint tool handles for visibility.
- Use a holster.

### Trick: You Can Bring Color into Your Garden Even Without Flowers

- Use colorful bottles, pots, walls and found objects.

### Tools: Good Pruners are Worth the Investment

- Always use the best and sharpest tools available.
- “It’s worth paying more. They last a lifetime.”
- Felco, #2, #6, #7, #8.
- Ratcheting pruners.

- Don't cut a branch bigger than your hand tool allows - it will damage the hinge.

### Tools: Find Good Gloves

- Find something that feels like you're barehanded, like Foxgloves.
- Womenswork Digger gloves.
- Sizes help.
- Latex coating gives good grip without losing texture.

### Tool: Hori-Hori Knife

- Strong, sharp blade.
- Narrow to get in tight spaces.
- Long to get out tap roots and onion grass bulbs.
- Means "dig dig" in Japanese.
- Serrated side cuts through roots.
- Many are marked with inches.

### Tool: Take Care of Your Tools

- Use a diamond blade sharpener.
- Keep your tools clean. Keep a sturdy wire brush handy for scouring/removing caked-on dirt.
- Keep a bin filled with builder's sand - shove your tools up and down in the sand to clean them.
- Add lightweight car oil to the sand to oil your tools while you clean them. Mineral oil is a good alternative.

### Tool: Pick Ax

- A great tool for tackling hard-to remove roots and plants.
- Also helpful for dividing plants.

### Tool: CobraHead Weeder

- "My favorite garden tool."
- Good torque, gets into tight places, affordable.

### Tools: Plan for Proper Support

- Some plants (especially those with big flowers) benefit from grow-through supports including: zinnias, coreopsis, peonies, campanula, baptisia, monarda, dahlias.
- Small tomato cages work great for dwarf tomatoes, peppers and eggplants, though they are too small for regular tomatoes.
- You can connect the tops of two tomato cages end to end to make them large enough for tomatoes.

- Use tomato cages to support peonies. If you leave them in the ground, they rust and blend in well.

### Tools: Shovels

- Root Slayer shovel.
- Spearhead Spade.
- Both rounded and straight shovels - the straight ones are great for edging or precision hole digging.
- A long handle improves torque.

### Tool: Hose Timer

- A hose timer screws onto your faucet and you screw the hose onto the timer. No water will come out until you set the timer.
- Great for turning off sprinklers and soaker hoses.

### Tool: Stretch Out Watering With Ollas

- Ollas (sometimes spelled Oya) are ceramic vessels used in the Southwest U.S. for irrigation.
- They are buried in the ground and allow water to seep out through capillary action in the root zone.
- They must be dug up before the first freeze in areas with low temperatures.
- You can easily make your own ollas out of clay pots. Instructions are at: <https://www.nativeseeds.org/blogs/blog-news/how-to-use-olla-irrigation#>

