Lawn & Garden

A bed of color is easy to create

Photo Submitted

Dig two to three inches of a 50:50 blend of peat moss and compost into a new flowerbed to ensure a healthy soil for your garden.

(MS) -- If you've admired a neighbor's flower-filled landscape, but didn't know where to start to beautify your own yard, follow this simple advice: Start small. A single flowerbed is easy to create in a weekend or less and will stay colorful all summer long.

PLAN BEFORE YOU PLANT

Look around your yard for a logical focal point for a flowerbed. Do you have a small tree or a large flowering shrub? Or how about a birdbath, sundial or some other object that will be taller than your plants when they're fully-grown? Pay attention to how much sun the area receives -- is it in the sun most of the day or only a few hours? This will be important when selecting plants.

Use a tape measure to determine the size of your new bed. Keep it small: 3 feet across or less is ideal, so you can reach plants growing toward the center or close to the back. Sketch the dimensions of the bed on graph paper. On another page, make two columns for notes on shorter and taller plants. Then, take both with you to visit your local home or garden center.

SELECT PLANTS

You don't have to spend hours weaving through the plant aisles to get what you need. Simply select a few flowers with colors and textures you like, and then check the labels for how much sun the plants need, how tall they'll grow and how far apart they should be planted. Look for taller plants to surround your focal point and shorter ones toward the edges of the bed. If you have trouble choosing, pick out just two varieties, one taller, like zinnias or geraniums, and one shorter, like marigolds for sunny spots or coleus and bright impatiens for the shade.

Next, look at the various edgings available -- from bricks or landscape timbers to flexible plastic garden edging. The edge separates lawn and flowerbed, so you can mow grass without cutting down plants.

Once you've selected the plants and edging you want, quickly sketch their dimensions on your graph paper to determine how many plants you'll need. To get you started, here's a sample shopping list and the tools you'll need to finish the job.

SHOPPING LIST

* Small bag of Canadian Sphagnum peat moss.
* Small bag of compost.
* Two to seven medium-tall plants that complement or contrast with your focal point.
* Two to seven shorter plants, all of one type.
* Shredded bark or other mulch.
* Edging to surround flowerbed.

TOOL CHECKLIST

* Shovel
* Hoe
* Rake

BEFORE YOU PLANT

Use a garden hose or a length of rope to create an outline for your flowerbed. This lets you see how you like the shape of the bed and provides a digging guide. The next -- and most critical step -- is to improve the soil.

Start by loosening the ground across the entire bed. Remove the weeds, sod or old plants from the area. Next, spread two to three inches of peat moss, or a 50:50 blend of peat moss and compost, across the bed. Then, dig this into the top

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LAWN AND GARDEN

It is time to get ready for gardening season as the weather cooperates

By Jill Hatton
EFNEP Program Assistant
Nicholas County Extension Office

Despite the cooler than normal seasonal temperatures, gardening is on many of our minds and rightfully so since April is National Gardening Month. In this article you will find some helpful hints for starting a garden and the healthy reasons related to gardening. Every gardener should follow these seven steps to have a successful gardening season:

1.) Plan your garden on paper before you begin.

2.) Select a good gardening site that is full of sun for at least 8 hours each day, relatively level, well-drained, close to a water source, and not shaded.

3.) Prepare the soil properly and add fertilizer and lime according to soil test recommendations.

4.) Plan only as large a garden as you can easily maintain.

5.) Grow vegetables that will produce the maximum amount of food in the available space.

6.) Plant during the correct season for the crop.

7.) Harvest vegetables at their proper stage of maturity.

Gardening is a great family activity. Gardening gives families a chance to be active, relax, and spend time together. Growing vegetables teaches children that plants need food and water to grow and stay healthy.

Caring and maintaining the garden also helps develop responsibility in children. Self-esteem can be built by gardening because it enables a child to see what they can grow. Gardening will also teach children about new foods.

This can encourage children to try new foods because often children will try foods which they helped grow and prepare.

Produce fresh from the garden tastes better and is better for you. A garden can also provide food your family needs at very little cost. Extra produce can be preserved to eat during the winter months.

This is also a great family activity to do with children. The children need be a little older in order to be safe during processing.

The following foods are a list that is easy for children to grow: beets, carrots, cherry tomatoes, greens, cucumbers, green beans, herbs, lettuce, okra, onion, peppers, spinach, tomatoes, and zucchini.

Also several of these vegetables would be great container gardens to have your child plant in case you do not live in an area with the ability to have a garden.

In town vegetables and herbs can grow in a sunny place on the roof, fire escape, balcony, or maybe even a window seal.

For more information about gardening please contact the Extension Office at 289-2312.

Keep you lawn strong through summer

(MS) -- More and more, homeowners are taking better care of their lawns. Whether it's pride in their property or just the knowledge that a good-looking lawn increases a home's curb appeal when it comes time to sell, homeowners nationwide have made proper lawn care a priority.

For new homeowners or those just beginning to venture out into the vast wilderness known as the yard, there are a few ways to ensure your lawn maintains its appeal in the face of even the most harsh weather conditions.

Photo Submitted

Mowing at the proper length is one way to maintain a healthy and attractive lawn.

* Keep your grass tall: Professional landscapers never cut grass too low. To the cynical, this is seen as a landscaper's way of staying relevant: the higher the grass gets, the more the landscaper will need to come back and keep mowing. However, taller grass is far more beneficial to your yard, as any landscaper worth his salt can tell you. Taller grass allows for roots to grow deeper. In addition, the shade created by taller grass makes it far more difficult for weeds to grow. For most lawns, it's best to keep grass at least three inches high.

* Only mow under certain conditions and don't be overly concerned about clippings: When mowing, make sure the grass is dry. Also, avoid mowing during drought or in summer months when the temperatures are intense. In general, it's best to limit what you cut to no more than one-third the length of a grass blade. So while the ideal height for grass is three inches, if you've let your lawn grow higher than 4.5 inches, then adjust your blades so they'll only cut roughly one-third of the grass. For the next cut, to get back to a three-inch height, make sure you cut the grass before it exceeds 4.5 inches in height.

A common misconception about grass clippings is that they are harmful to a lawn. In fact, clippings can enrich the soil and make for a stronger yard. However, this is only the case when fertilizer is properly applied. If it's not, clippings could lead to thatch. Consult your local lawncare store and discuss how to correctly apply a fertilizer.

* Water properly: The best time to water is early morning. If you wait until the afternoon to water, especially during months of intense heat, evaporation will render much of that water ineffective. Watering at night tends to promote the growth of fungi.

Another common mistake is to water frequently for short periods of time. This is both a waste of water and time. Grass will not benefit greatly from this type of watering, which will promote shallow roots, eeply, so periods of heavy watering are ideal. This doesn't need to be done every day. In fact, most lawns will only require one session per week of deep watering.

What's your zone?

When purchasing plants and trees tag lists show specific hardiness zones in which the plant should thrive. According to The National Arbor Day Foundation, the United States and Canada are divided into 11 areas based on 10 degree Fahrenheit changes in the average annual minimum temperature.

COLOR
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of soil. The peat moss helps sandy soil hold moisture, so you won't have to water as often, and it loosens and improves the drainage in clay or hard packed soil, so air can get to the plant roots. It also makes weeding easier and reduces the amount of fertilizer you'll need.

Once the soil is ready, position the plants according to their planting instructions. Then, complete the bed with a layer of shredded bark or other bagged mulch to give it a more polished look. Water your new bed frequently until the plants take hold and then regularly during the summer to supplement the rainfall in your area. Then, just watch your garden grow and enjoy. No one has to know it took less than a weekend to create.

To order free brochures on "How to ... with peat moss" and other gardening tips, send a self-addressed, unstamped, business-sized envelope to: Peat Moss, Box 385102, Minneapolis, MN, 55438; E-mail cspma@peat-moss.com.

The Canadian peat industry is committed to making peat moss a sustainable resource. Only one acre in every 6,000 is harvested and when harvesting stops, the bogs are restored to functioning peatlands. For more information on peat and the environment, visit the Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association's Web site at www.neatmoss.com.

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