

# Gardening Through The Seasons



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## **Why Gardening Is Good for Your Health and Life:**

Gardening is a fantastic activity in many ways. It's a great form of exercise, stress reliever, creative outlet, and just plain old good fun. Studies have shown that regular exposure to nature and fresh air is good for us. Not only will you feel energized and refreshed after a gardening session, but you'll also feel a great sense of achievement.

### **Here are a few other reasons why gardening is a great all-around exercise:**

#1 – Stress relief. Many of us lead very stressful lives. Gardening is a good way of relieving that stress. It's a quiet, gentle activity that also helps you connect with nature and clear your mind. There's something very nurturing about getting close to the earth and having a part in helping something grow.

#2 – Great for joints and flexibility. As we get older, so do our joints and mobility. Gardening is a great option for keeping your joints supple and flexible without too much pressure. Simple exercises like bending, lifting and light digging will help your flexibility and muscle tone. All of this will lead to improved health and quality of life.

#3 – Keeps you busy. If you already have a busy schedule then gardening may be something you fit in on the weekends or in short spurts. However, if you're out of work or retired, keeping a garden is a great way of staying active, fit and healthy. You'll also feel a wonderful sense of achievement when you see the fruit of your labour.

#4 – Great social activity. Gardening is becoming increasingly popular. Many people are joining community garden projects and schemes. This is a great way to bond with your community. It's also a fantastic opportunity for swapping home-grown produce and teaching your kids and family about healthy eating. Gardening is a great link for friendships. It's a good way to meet like-minded people doing something you enjoy.

#5 – Great for children. Children are naturally geared to love gardening. They have an inbuilt instinct for connecting with the earth around them. Give a young child a small shovel and a vegetable patch and they may happily dig for hours. Exposure to gardening also shows kids the importance of food and healthy eating, as well as caring for their environment. Many schools now have gardening clubs and projects to help children get involved as gardeners too.

On the surface gardening seems like a great health activity, and it is, but there are also many other wonderful benefits. Along with getting plenty of fresh air and exercise you can relieve stress, make new friends, show your kids the importance of our environment and keep your joints and muscles supple. It's a fantastic all-around activity to enjoy.

## **Grow Your Own – How to Plant Your Spring Vegetable Garden:**

Grocery prices continue to sky-rocket along with fuel costs. It's times like these when you want to grow your own. Learn how to plant your spring vegetable garden by following these guidelines.

Before you can begin a garden it helps to know what growing zone you're in. If you live in the United States, you can go to the National Gardening Association's website ([www.garden.org/zipzone/](http://www.garden.org/zipzone/)) to find the USDA Hardiness Zone Map. This map will help you find which zone you live in and give ideas on when it is safe to start planting.

You'll also want to prepare the ground before you can begin planting. Do this by tilling the area you have planned for your garden. You'll want to remove the clumps of grass as much as possible or till deeply to incorporate the organic matter into the soil. Test the soil to determine if it has the right mineral content. Tests can be obtained at County Extension Agencies and home and garden stores. Add any nutrients to the soil before you begin planting.

Growing your first garden is much easier if you start with seedlings rather than growing your own. If you do plan to grow your plants from seeds, you'll want to start them indoors about eight weeks before they can be planted in the ground. Purchase the plants you want and keep them indoors until your area has reached the last average frost date.

When the ground is workable, the first vegetables you'll want to add to your garden are spinach, peas and onions. Onions are sold in sets and you may be able to find seedling spinach. You can plant the pea seeds directly into the garden. You may be able to plant lettuce, beets, carrots, cilantro, dill, radishes, cabbage and broccoli about two weeks before the last frost. Celery, kale and potatoes can also be grown outdoors.

When you know there's no chance of a late frost, you can plant melons, squash, cucumbers and beans. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, pumpkins and basil can also be planted at this time. When you plant corn, set out at least four short rows rather than one long row because they pollinate properly that way. You'll also want to use poles or trellises for beans. Tomatoes, peppers and eggplant are best transplanted or purchased as plants prior to setting them in your garden.

If you follow these guidelines and learn how to plant your own spring garden, you may have produce in as little as four weeks. Take time to pull weeds and keep your garden watered but not muddy. As the produce is ready to harvest you'll be enjoying the fruits of your labour on your kitchen table.

## Tips to Spring Clean Your Garden:

When you hear the term “spring cleaning” you more than likely think of your home. You know, you have things which have accumulated during the winter you want to get rid of. You can do the same thing outside. In fact, here are some tips to spring clean your garden.

As soon as you can get out in the warmer springtime weather, you may want to do the following:

- \* Go through your garden to remove any dead annuals which remained in the garden over the colder weather. You can add these to your compost pile or begin one if you haven't already done so.
- \* Now is also a good time to prune back any perennials you have in your garden. Of course, you'll want to wait until you see new growth at the base of the plant before you prune them back.
- \* Woody-stemmed plants such as lavender and buddleia are cut back each year to allow for new blooms on new plant growth. Wait until you know there's no chance of frost or you could kill the plant.
- \* Trim back any torn leaves from semi-evergreen plants such as hellebores or bearded iris. This will encourage the plant to send out new growth as well as help them look better while you wait for growth.
- \* Ornamental grasses are generally cut near the ground, within a few inches, to encourage new growth. Since these grasses are hardy, they'll come up in their own time no matter when you trim them back.
- \* Pull up any weeds you see in flower gardens while the soil is damp. This will make it easier to rid your garden of the weeds, especially while they're small. Be careful not to compost these weeds or they may take over your compost pile or possibly spread into other areas where you don't want them.
- \* Test your soil to determine if it needs fertilizer. You can also amend your soil with other organic material to get it in the top shape possible.
- \* Divide or transplant during the spring. The earlier you get this done, the better chance your plants will have to survive.
- \* Stake out your garden space. You may want to go ahead and plan your garden while you're at it, too. Planning and staking your garden will train your plants early on,

rather than having to struggle with them later in the growing season.

\* Place a generous layer of mulch in your garden. This will cool the plant roots when needed, feed the soil, conserve water, and help keep weeds at bay.

\* Edge your garden in the springtime and it will prevent your lawn from encroaching into the flower or vegetable garden. You'd also be surprised how much nicer a garden looks when it's edged.

There's nothing like a tidy garden to begin the spring. Using these tips to spring clean your garden will get it in tip-top shape while you're waiting for the flowers to bloom!

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## **Vegetable Gardening This Summer - What You Should Do Now:**

Anyone planning a vegetable garden knows that what you do before summer can have a big effect on how your garden grows. There are many things you can do now to ensure your vegetable gardening this summer is productive. Try these tips and watch your garden prosper.

If you haven't already done so, now is the perfect time to till your garden spot. Determine how large you want the garden to be and mark it off. Run the tiller in the garden to incorporate plant matter from the last year.

You may also want to test your soil to see if it has the proper nutrients needed for a vegetable garden. Soil tests can be purchased from most plant nurseries or other stores which sell gardening supplies. Local colleges may provide testing free of charge if they have degrees related to farming.

Plan what you'll plant. You may already know what vegetables you want to grow but chances are you'll change your mind at least once before the plants are in the ground. Think about the vegetables your family loves the most. Corn, tomatoes, green beans, cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower are common plants in a family vegetable garden.

Consider whether you'll start seeds or purchase the plants partially grown. Of course, there's nothing quite like watching seedlings as they sprout and grow, but buying pre-grown seedlings makes getting the plants in the garden much quicker. Which plants can you start from seed and which ones will you purchase?

Once you know what you'll plant, think about where you'll place each one. Some plants are best planted close to others. These are called companion plants. They may either provide natural pest resistance or nutrients the other plant needs. Take time to research which plants can benefit the others in your garden.

Determine how you're going to deal with weeds in your garden. Will you rely solely upon chemicals to avoid having to weed, or is there another method you can use? Consider using newspaper covered by black landscaping fabric or black plastic sheeting between rows. This will greatly reduce the amount of weeding you'll have to do. You can also use the black landscaping fabric in the rows themselves by cutting an 'x' where the plants will go. This fabric allows the rain to get through and yet blocks much of the sunlight so the weeds can't grow.

What will you do about pests? Some gardeners are content to use chemical pesticides. If you're considering a 'greener' approach, you may want to add beneficial insects to your garden. These would include ladybugs, praying mantis and earthworms.

Don't forget to check your garden tools. Give your tiller and other mechanical equipment a spring-time tune-up. Ensure your rakes, hoes and other hand tools don't have loose handles. You'll also want to ensure they aren't rusty.

Think about other items you may need for your vegetable garden this year. Do you have a large-brimmed hat to keep the sun off your face and neck? What about something to sit or kneel on while you're planting? Do you have a place to sit back and enjoy your garden after the work is done?

There's so much involved in planting a summer garden you'll want to get started as soon as you can. You can check your tools to ensure they're in good working order, plan your garden and start your seeds. Before you know it, the time will be here to begin your garden in earnest and you can look forward to summer with home-grown vegetables.

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## September Gardening 101:

If you've been gardening all summer, you've likely enjoyed the fruits of your labour. Fresh vegetables, fruits or flowers have graced your dinner table in one manner or another. But now the summer is nearing an end. You may be wondering what you can do in September to prepare your garden for the coming winter and the next summer.

When September rolls around it is important to stop fertilizing trees and flowering shrubs. They need the year's growth to harden off for protection during the winter. Perennials are slowing down for the winter, going into a type of dormancy, so they no longer need fertilization.

For annuals which you'll replant in the spring, they have served their purpose. They can either be pulled up and put into a mulch pile, or mowed down and tilled under. Either option will break down the plant and add organic nutrients back into your soil.

House-plants which have spent the summer outdoors should be taken back indoors for the winter. Before taking the plants indoors, be sure to check the plants carefully for any insects or pests. Any hitch-hiking pests you take into the house may continue to thrive indoors rather than dying outdoors.

Take cuttings of plants you want to keep over the winter but can't dig up and bring indoors. This will give you a head start on having plants for the next year's garden. If your garden is overrun with perennials, divide and move them to enable the plants to survive and thrive.

Start planting the spring flowering bulbs you've purchased. This is another way to get a head start on next year's flower beds. For bulbs which are too tender to leave out all winter – such as dahlias, caladiums, tuberous begonias and cannas – dig them up and store them until spring. Check the hardiness zones for the bulbs you want to plant to ensure they can be planted now rather than later.

For cool season vegetables, you can sow the seed directly into the prepared soil rather than growing seedlings to transplant in the spring. These would include lettuce, greens, onions, beans, peas and broccoli. Follow the instructions on the seed packets as far as how deep to plant the seeds, whether or not they need to be covered, and if so, how they should be covered.

These are a few ideas of activities you can do in September to prepare your garden for next year. If you're new to gardening and still unsure about how best to spend September in your garden, talk with local farmers or neighbours who have gardens you admire. They will most likely provide you with all the help you need to ensure your garden will be ready for the next growing season.



## **Preparing a Vegetable Plot for Winter:**

If you have enjoyed the fruits of your labor all summer long in the way of produce, you know how important it is to prepare a vegetable plot for winter. It helps to know what to do at the end of the growing season, as this can have a large impact on the next year's harvest. These same ideas will also help you plan ahead and prepare an area for a garden if you've never grown one before.

Whether your proposed garden plot has had a garden there in the past or not, chances are there will be plant matter in the area. This could be plants which have yielded their last, or grass and weeds from the lawn. In either case you want to mark off the area you plan to use for your springtime garden. The best way to do this is to use wooden stakes pounded into the four corners, with coloured tape to help you see the borders.

Divide the garden into five parts. One part will be set aside for plants which come back each year such as herbs, artichokes, rhubarb and asparagus. The remaining three plots will be rotated each year to ensure you don't deplete the soil of nutrients.

Leave enough area between the parts to be able to walk and push a wheelbarrow through. This can be covered in gravel to keep weeds at bay, or you can use landscape fabric with bark chips to create a suitable surface. Of course, you don't want to create such large sections to make it necessary to walk all over the beds. If you make the areas small enough, you should be able to reach the centre from the side which means you'll have less area to work.

Till under any organic matter which might be in the garden plot. You can also add any other organic materials such as manure or nutrients into the soil, and incorporate well. This will prepare the ground for the spring and provide any birds which are still around with a meal of any worms or insects which are in the soil.

Cover the entire garden with mulch to reduce the opportunity for winter weeds to grow. If you'd rather not use mulch because you may forget where the garden paths are, you can also sow a cover crop which will be tilled under in the spring.

Why not take advantage of the fact that you have the soil prepared and sow some winter vegetables. Carrots, onions and garlic can be planted in late summer to early fall. Allow the plants to germinate in the soil and cut back any green growth prior to the first frost. Cover them with mulch to keep the plants alive during the winter months and ready to grow come springtime.

Gardening is a time-consuming but rewarding experience. Think about preparing a vegetable plot for winter so it will have the best chance to succeed in the spring. Make some plans now on how you want to lay out the garden and what vegetables you want to plant, and then decide when to begin sowing seed indoors to be transplanted once spring arrives.

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## **Winterize Your Potted Outdoor Plants:**

People who love plants generally have a number of them around their home. These plants can be found in flower gardens, vegetable gardens and in large pots around the porch or patio. You'll want to winterize your potted outdoor plants so they survive until spring by following these tips.

Think about bringing outdoor potted plants in at least three weeks before the first expected frost. Begin preparing a place in your home or well-lit garage to house your plants during the winter months. The plants will still require full sunlight during the day and you'll need to provide humidity by misting them regularly. If possible, place your plants in an east-facing or south-facing window to receive the most sunlight.

Pull your potted plants out of direct sunlight into a shadier area for a couple of days to help the plants adjust to the difference in light slowly. Leave them in the shade for at least a week before moving them into the house. Of course, if they can be kept in the shade for a couple of weeks, it would be better. This will prepare your plants for being moved indoors where the light will be filtered or artificial rather than direct light.

Check your outdoor plants for pests before bringing them in. Remove any aphids, spiders or other insects which may be hiding among the leaves. This will keep the pests from overwintering in your home or possibly infecting other indoor plants.

You may have some plants which have been grown in the ground that you want to preserve for spring. Dig those plants up and pot them a couple of weeks before moving them indoors. Be sure to allow for plenty of drainage and keep a basin underneath the pot to avoid water getting on the floor.

Trim the plants a little bit to encourage new growth and make the plants small enough to fit in your home. When it's time to move the plants back outdoors you'll want to trim them back again. Trimming the plants helps them adjust to the changes in temperature and humidity.

Forgo fertilizing your plants while they're indoors. You'll want to water them thoroughly but not too often. Outdoor plants aren't accustomed to having very much rain or fertilization during the late autumn and winter months, because that's not the time for growth. Begin fertilizing and watering more often right before moving the plants back outdoors.

Depending upon where you live, you might be able to dig a ditch around the garden to bury the potted plants. Water the plants monthly but only so the soil is damp to the touch. Dig about 12 to 15 inches down so the pot can be placed in the soil. Pile mulch around the pot and plant to help sustain the temperature during cold months.

Check with local gardeners if this is your first year to winterize your potted outdoor plants. Most gardeners are glad to help one another out. The above ideas are a start, but talking to an experienced gardener might be your best bet in winterizing any potted plants you have.

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## **How to Preserve Your Late Summer Fruits:**

You have worked all spring and summer long to grow your garden with great success. You discover that you cannot possibly use all of the fruits that have sprung up in your garden. No problem - preserve them for future use. You can use different methods to preserve your fruits such as canning, freezing and drying. You can even use a simple recipe and create your own jams, preserves or butters to further indulge in. Best of all, by preserving your fruit you are ensuring that you are not letting all of the labor you put into your garden go to waste.

### **Freezing**

The easiest way to preserve your fruit is to freeze it and store it for later use. How to freeze your fruit depends on the type of fruit. For berries, drain the berries in a colander for about 30 minutes then lie them on a cookie sheet and stick in the freezer overnight. You can take the berries out the next day and bag them when they are completely frozen.

Melons should be cut out of the rinds and sprinkled with sugar before freezing. The sugar helps to preserve the flavor of the melons. All fruit needs to be placed in a freezer bag or freezer safe container and marked with the date of freeze. Frozen fruit can be kept in the freezer for up to one year.

### **Canning**

Canning is another great way to preserve your fruit. Pick the fruit when it is at its ripest for canning methods. Cut the fruit up and place into canning jars. You do not have to use sugar to sweeten the fruit, but like when freezing melons, using a simple syrup will help keep your canned fruit's flavour and colour.

To make a simple syrup, all you have to do is melt some sugar in water and pour over the fruit in the jar. You then need to give your canned fruit a hot water bath in order to seal the jars.

To give a hot water bath, place your jars in a pan filled halfway with hot water. Once the jars are in place, pour more boiling water over the tops of the jars (with lids on) until they are submerged. Turn on the burner and boil the jars for about 10 minutes or so. Remove the jars and place them on a cooling rack or on a towel on the counter. As the jars cool you will hear a popping sound. This will be the jars sealing. It will take approximately 12 – 24 hours for the jars to complete the sealing process.

## **Drying**

Drying your fruit is another way to preserve it for the winter months. Drying your fruit is a bit more involved than freezing or canning. To dry your fruit, pick ripe fruit as immature fruit will not have any flavour and overripe fruit will dry in a mushy state.

Once you have picked your fruit, cut it into strips to prepare for the drying process. In order to dry fruit, you first need to pre-treat the slices. You can do this by dipping in ascorbic acid (vitamin C), citric acid or lemon juice. Once the slices have been pre-treated, you can use your oven to dry the fruit. This will take between 3 – 36 hours depending upon the size of the slices. Dried fruit should be leathery and pliable to be considered done and a deterrent to microbial growth.

Preserving your summer fruits is a great way to prevent spoilage and waste from your labours in the garden. Pick fruit when they are ripe and depending upon your tastes and effort you can preserve your fruit in different ways. Freezing, canning and drying are all great ways to keep your fruit preserved until you are ready to enjoy them.

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## **Freezing Vegetables and Fruit Guide:**

Freezing fruit and vegetables is a great way to make your produce last a lot longer than the shelf-life. It also protects your produce from spoiling and keeps it handy for when you wish to use it, avoiding having to spend a lot of money for out-of-season produce. Frozen fruit and vegetables can be stored in your freezer for up to one year, giving you a lot of time to use them up.

To freeze vegetables, it is a good idea to blanch them first. You can blanch the vegetables by immersing them in boiling water for up to five minutes. By blanching them, you are killing any bacteria that may be present. Some bacteria will be killed by the freezing, but many can tolerate very cold temperatures and flare up when you defrost the vegetables.

As well as killing bacteria, blanching also helps to kill any little bugs that you might not be able to see. Once you have finished blanching your vegetables, move them to ice water and keep them in the water, adding more ice as necessary for as long as you blanch them. If you blanched your beans for five minutes, cool them off in ice water for five minutes as well.

To prepare your vegetables for freezing, cut them up into small pieces. This will only apply to items such as sugar peas, green beans and other similar items. Beans can be frozen as is after they are blanched. Be sure to store your foods in freezer bags as the bags are designed to keep your fruits and vegetables from developing freezer burn.

Freezing fruit is a little different as it does not require blanching. Blanching fruit may actually destroy it before you get the chance to use it. To freeze your fruit, after you pick it let it sit in a colander for up to 30 minutes. This will drain any water off of the fruit, even water that you can't see.

After you have let the fruit sit and drain, place the fruit on a cookie sheet with some wax paper and place it in the freezer overnight. Be sure not too many of the individual fruits are touching each other; this will cause them to stick together. The fruit will completely freeze overnight. You can bag the fruit the next day in individual bags and rest assured that when you go to use the fruit, they will not all be stuck together in one huge ice cube.

Make sure you label the fruit and vegetables with the date they were packed. Most vegetables are good for up to nine months to a year. Fruit can be frozen for up to a year as well, in freezer bags. If you choose to vacuum seal your bags then freeze them, the fruits and vegetables may last up to 18 months. After you have frozen your fruit and vegetables, reward yourself for a job well done and money saved.

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## **How to Dry Flowers:**

The end of summer will soon be here. And even though you may have enjoyed the beauty of your flower gardens all summer long, you may be wondering how to enjoy the blooms long after summer has ended. Learning how to dry flowers can be the answer to your dilemma.

Dried flowers may not be as fragrant as fresh cut flowers, but they can be as beautiful. Dried flowers can also be a great way to decorate your home by bringing the outdoors inside. Decorating with dried flowers is also less expensive than using silk and you can dry your summer flowers at home.

This article will give you a list of the best flowers to dry and explain how to dry them so you can enjoy them for a long time.

### **The best summertime flowers for drying include:**

- \* Baby's breath
- \* Bachelor's button
- \* Cockscomb
- \* Larkspur
- \* Roses
- \* Sage
- \* Statice
- \* Strawflower
- \* Yarrow

You can also dry cat-tail, iris, milkweed, lotus, poppy and Queen Anne's lace.

Pick flowers which don't have brown edges or those which have been eaten by insects. You also don't want misshapen flowers as part of an arrangement so you'll want to leave them in the garden. Flowers won't look better after they're dried than they do when they're fresh, so you want to choose the best flowers possible.

Choose flowers which are only partially opened. The flowers will continue opening during the drying process. Gather more flowers than you think you'll need for the dried arrangement. This will ensure you have the right number of flowers in case some don't look as good as you'd like.

One way to dry flowers, and often considered the easiest, is to hang a group of flowers upside down in a somewhat dry, warm and dark area. Be sure the location is dry because excess moisture can cause the flowers to mould. Expect for the flowers to take at least two to three weeks when you hang them to dry.

You can also use your microwave to dry flowers. With this process you'll need to purchase desiccating pellets which can be found in the floral section of most craft stores. You may also be able to purchase some from floral supply stores.

Find a microwave-safe container and put a layer of the pellets on the container and microwave them for about three minutes. This will dry them out completely. Then pour the dried pellets into a bowl about an inch deep.

Trim the flowers and place them into the bowl so the stem is standing up in the pellets. Then pour more pellets over the blooms until they are completely covered. Microwave the flowers for two to five minutes. Leave the flowers in the microwave for longer if they are larger blooms.

After the flowers have cooled for at least 20 minutes, pour the crystals off the blooms. Clean the petals until there are no pellets remaining. Using floral wire, tape the flowers to the wire and create your arrangement.

You can expect the flowers to look darker after they're dried than they were cut fresh. Once they are dried they can be used to decorate your home. Now you realize drying flowers isn't difficult, you may decide to try to dry other flowers than the ones on the above list.

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## **Designing Your Own Irrigation System:**

Do you get tired of dragging out the water hose whenever the flowers in your yard look droopy? You may be wondering if designing your own irrigation system is a good idea. The fact is that you can install an irrigation system on a budget if you take the time to learn more about it and do the work yourself.

You may be surprised to learn that adding an irrigation system can add value to your home. Having an irrigation system can also save you time and money. If you've been considering including a new irrigation system to your home improvement projects, now is the perfect time to get started.

Start by getting a lot survey of your property. This will show the size of the property, location of the house on the lot, driveway, side-walk, fences or water and electrical lines which are already in place on your lot. This will ensure you don't damage the utilities when digging.

Check to see if there are permits required to add an irrigation system. You will also want to find out what the water pressure is, either by calling the local municipality or using a pressure gauge. The size of the water meter for your home may also be a determining factor in the type of irrigation system you can have.

Look at your yard, any landscaping which has already been done and where you'll need the irrigation system. Think of the sprinkler heads you'll need or if you'll use a different system such as a soaker system. You'll also want to consider putting the system on a timer to ensure the irrigation works at the time when it is most beneficial to your landscaping.

What plants will need to be watered? You may need a different type of system for the types of plants you have. They may need to be watered at different times so you may have to design watering zones. You can learn from books, magazines, hardware or garden centre employees.

Depending upon the system you design, it can be an expensive project. Some irrigation systems can cost well over \$2500. Of course, if you do much of the work yourself, you can cut out some of the associated labour costs.

Measure the distance from the water source or spigot and each of the watering zones. Add several extra inches for non-direct path hoses or tubing. Add the distance on the drawing you make or start another sheet of paper with a list for each of the water zones.

You may end up designing two or more systems for your yard. There may be differing requirements for summer than you would need during other times of the year. Perhaps the actual design won't have to change, but when you have the timer set may change throughout the year.

Having an irrigation system can save both in water conservation and your water bill. Instead of over watering, your system on a timer will start and stop at a specific time of day when the plants need the most water. You'll also save time because it will be automatic rather than your having to stand out in the yard with a hose.

By designing and installing an irrigation system, your yard will look great and you'll have more time to spend with your family.

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## **Easy Guide to Composting:**

Making your own compost can be an economical way to use kitchen scraps and yard waste, and it is a natural means of keeping your yard, garden, and plants healthy. If you'd like to get started composting, here are some simple guidelines.

### **How Much?**

Before you begin, sit down and think about how much compost you need, how much kitchen and yard waste you generate, and what kind of space you have. Depending on these factors, you'll need to decide whether or not you want to go with indoor or outdoor composting, whether or not you want to use worms, and whether or not you want a bin.

Indoor composting is recommended for people whose space is limited, such as those with small houses and yards or apartment dwellers.

**Worms are often used in small, indoor compost systems.**

For those with larger outdoor areas, compost bins can be built outdoors for little money and effort. You can also compost without a bin and simply make a pile in a sheltered corner of your yard.

### **Build the Bin**

If you are going to compost indoors, you will need a container of some sort, and worms are considered essential for indoor composting. You can purchase a ready-made worm composting system, or you can make your own by poking holes in an opaque, plastic container and setting it on a drainage tray. The worms initially feed on wet, shredded newspaper; then you begin adding kitchen scraps and more newspaper. The worm bin should never be allowed to get below 55 degrees.

For an outdoor bin, a low-cost, easy method is to use wooden packing pallets. Most stores that receive shipments in these slatted containers are fine with people taking them (use packing pallets are usually discarded). You just need four of the pallets to make an open-topped square to hold your compost. You can wire or nail them together; just make sure one side is easily removed so you can access the compost.

### **Piles of Compost**

If you don't want to build a bin, you can just make a pile of yard and kitchen scraps. You will need to turn it often to keep its heaped shape, but this basic method can work. It seems to work best if the compost pile is against a house or other building.

### **Compost Care and Feeding**

Excepting dairy products, fish and meat, you can put most kitchen scraps into your compost, including egg shells, tea leaves, and coffee grounds. Any organic matter from your yard can be added, such as hay, straw, cut grass, leaves, mulch, wood chips, and slender prunings from shrubs. You can also add a modest amount of shredded newspaper. Any paper, however, takes longer to decompose.

If you have chickens, the cleanings from their coop can be added to the compost. Chicken manure makes the compost rich and full of nutrients. However, the waste from other pets (dogs, cats, etc.) should not be added to compost.

Turn your compost once a month or so, stirring to aerate it and get the top layer down into the middle.

Water your compost briefly with a garden hose if the weather is very dry. Better yet, water it with rain water from a rain barrel.

## **The Benefits of Natural Lawn Care:**

What is natural lawn care? Essentially, caring for your lawn naturally means you don't use synthetic chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides on your lawn. It means you do use natural fertilizers and organic means of dealing with pests. Natural lawn care can apply to a few methods or you can go "all the way" and have a lawn that is "given back" to nature and not maintained artificially at all.

There are many benefits associated with natural lawn care. Here are some of them.

### **Healthier**

If you stop spraying your lawn with chemicals every season, your lawn will be free of these dubious substances. This may make your whole family healthier in the long run. It is probably healthier for the environment, too - lawns that are not doused with chemicals are lawns that do not shed these chemicals into the surrounding ecosystem and water supply each time it rains.

Also, caring for your lawn naturally usually results in lush, green grass that is healthier. Healthy grass absorbs more carbon dioxide from the air and puts out more oxygen.

### **Saves Water**

If you engage in natural lawn care, you will probably set up a rain barrel to provide water for your lawn. Even if you don't, you may find that you water a naturally-maintained yard less, because the grass is healthier, longer, and able to withstand dry conditions better.

### **Easier**

As you engage in natural lawn care, you may find it's a lot easier. There is less mowing involved, for one thing; natural lawns are generally allowed to grow to four inches or more. You can use your grass clippings as mulch, and you won't have the added chore of pouring on synthetic fertilizer and pesticides.

### **Saves Money**

Synthetic chemicals cost money. If you switch to natural lawn care, you will no longer be paying annually for chemical treatments and sprays.

## **Biodiversity**

If you go "all the way" with your natural lawn care and decide to let nature take over, you will find "weeds" setting in. Many of these "weeds" are valuable plants that are important to the surrounding ecosystem. Some of them are edible or medicinal, too.

## **Beneficial Insects and Birds**

A lawn that is cared for naturally will tend to attract wildlife, especially bees and birds. These important members of the ecosystem appreciate a sanctuary that is free from chemicals and where there is suitable habitat.

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