



9 Steps To Take To Lay The Groundwork For A Healthy Garden

Landscape design expert shares advice for achieving that Pinterest-worthy garden of your dreams.

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After a long winter spent indoors, a lush, healthy garden can help transform your backyard into the perfect outdoor living space for quiet mornings with coffee, weekend barbecues with friends, and every moment in between. That's why [ESTATENVY](#) recently talked to Clare Johnson, of [Christy Webber Landscapes](#), to discuss must-know tips for achieving that healthy, beautiful garden you've always wanted, but never quite knew how to achieve.

Choose the right garden.

If you're new to the gardening scene, Johnson recommends starting small. "A beautiful container garden can add a great deal of lush greenery to any space – big or small. Container gardens are especially perfect for the urban landscapers who may be looking to 'green' their

patio.” For the more advanced gardener, or those looking to dive right in, Johnson recommends a vegetable or perennial garden.

Provide the right amount of sunlight.

A key factor in whether or not your plants will flourish is dependant on the amount, and type, of sunlight your garden will get throughout the day. With that being said, taking the time to identify your garden’s zone, which can be found on the [USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map](#), and sun exposure is well worth the research! Identifying these two key components will help you figure out the best times and varieties to begin planting.

Consider the time of year.

Johnson says that a good general rule of thumb is to plant when the ground is thawed and there is no risk of frost. So typically, for most parts of the U.S., the spring and fall are the best seasons for planting. By doing so, you’ll ensure that your new plants have an adequate amount of time to settle into their new environment and take root into the soil.

Choose the right plants.

When it comes to choosing the best plants for your garden, Johnsen emphasizes the popular motto, “Right plant; right place.” Your local nursery is a great resource to use if you are unsure about which plants are best suited for your home’s climate, and should be able to educate you on the appropriate amount of sun, water and soil conditions necessary for each type of plant. For further guidance, gardeners can rely on [The Chicago Greystone and Vintage Home Landscape Guidelines](#), written in collaboration with the Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago, Inc. and Christy Webber Landscapes.

Implement effective weed control.

Mulch, especially triple-ground hardwood mulch, is a great, and visually-appealing, way to help prevent weeds from invading your garden. If you don’t like the look or smell of mulch, another option is to consider planting ground cover plants. Not only do they help fill the bare spaces in between, but they help fight off weeds and protect the topsoil from erosion and drought. Plus, they can effortlessly help to provide an extra pop of color and texture to your garden.

Choose the right fertilizer.

With so many different brands and products on the market, it can be tempting to go with the most appealing price tag, but Johnson warns to avoid harsh fertilizers often found on the shelves of big box stores, especially for perennial gardens.

“We recommend fertilizing with a balanced blend for perennial gardens. A 6-6-6 or 10-10-10 slow-release fertilizer will ensure your plants’ health throughout the growing season. For edible gardens, a hearty compost will help provide the necessary nutrients for the plant

material. Again, it's important to know your plants. For example, tomatoes like a bit more acidity; hydrangeas may require a different blend depending on the color blooms you desire.”

Consider laying mulch.

If you aren't already considering laying a bed of mulch to prevent weeds from sprouting up, you should consider it for its amazing soil-enhancing capabilities. gain, if you do not particularly enjoy the look or smell of mulch, Johnson highly recommends looking into laying leaf mulch. “Leaf mulch works great for perennial and annual beds as well. The nutrients in the leaf mulch help breakdown the nutrients, creating rich, healthy soil.”

Water responsibly.

The best time to water your garden is either early in the morning or early in the evening. “Watering in the morning allows time for the plant to absorb the water prior to the peak heat of the day,” says Johnson. She adds, “If you're watering in the evening, be sure to focus on watering the roots – not the leaves. This is a rule of thumb any time of day, but it's critical in the evening as wet leaves can lead to mold and disease.”

Continue with TLC.

During this entire process, Johnson advises that the most important thing to remember is that you are working with living, breathing things, meaning that even the most experienced gardeners and landscapers can have trouble planting and maintaining the perfect garden. With that being said, she adds that gardeners “can set themselves up for success by amending the soil with compost to ensure the necessary nutrients are in place. Again, talking with your local nursery, plant center or landscape company can go a long way in ensuring the success of your garden.”

Photo courtesy of [Christy Webber Landscapes](#).