



# Rules for Successful Gardening in Central Texas

1. Know the light and watering requirements of all your plants, and the best time of the year to plant them.
2. Enrich the soil. Our soils here are heavy clay with a high pH. The cure to poor soil is to amend with at least 40% organic matter. The best organic material is compost. Peat moss is not a good amendment material. Add volcanic rock powder and organic fertilizers. Have a soil test to make sure what your soil needs. Overdoing such things as minerals and fertilizers can do more harm than good. Contact your county extension office for details on a soil test. When you get your test back, follow the recommendations. Many times you will only need nitrogen fertilizer in Central Texas.
3. After planting, cover all bare areas with mulch; that is, partly composted material, shredded leaves, shredded tree trimmings, or shredded cedar. This will keep the ground cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter, and will break down to form organic matter in the soil. Do not worry about this material robbing nitrogen from the soil. It will not do this as long as you keep it on the surface and do not till it into the soil. This mulch will save you much work watering and removing weeds.
4. Plant during or after a rain in the fall, winter, or spring for best survival rate.
5. Never pack down the soil when planting anything, and do not walk on the beds. Always use stepping stones or paths and keep off the soil. This is absolutely vital!
6. Do not mix plants in a small bed that have different water and light requirements.
7. Use either native plants, shrubs, and trees, or well-adapted varieties. Don't spend much money or effort on plants that need cooler temperatures, more rainfall, or different soil than ours.
8. Buy only gardening books that are written for our area. Many gardening authors do not bother to tell you that their recommendations won't work here.
9. Work with nature, not against it. Improve soil health to improve plant health. Use beneficial insects. Encourage biodiversity by planting a variety of plants that provide shelter and food for the natural enemies of pests. When you view your garden, you should see it is alive with birds, toads, lizards, and beneficial insects such as green lacewings and ladybugs. All these creatures need water, provide a source for those who need water placed on the ground and those who need a birdbath.
10. Work wisely. Pulling a handful of weeds everyday is better than spending a sweltering afternoon picking weeds that are out of control. Trim non-blooming shrubs a little every month, so you are removing only a few inches here and there. Do heavy chores in the winter. Prepare beds in the fall or winter for spring crops and flowers so that you can just pop them into planting holes in wet springtime. Never wait to mow grass until you have to remove more than a third of the blades. Keep your tools sharp and in good repair.
11. True gardeners are always planning two seasons ahead. Good planning will save time and money, cut down on mistakes, and help you really enjoy gardening. Learn that everything you do in your yard affects it for a long time afterwards.
12. Be observant. Do you know what ladybug larva look like? Never just spray to kill an insect unless you know what it is; it may be a beneficial. Educate yourself so you will know. When you put in a garden, you are creating a micro habitat. You will know you have done well when it is teaming with life.
13. Recycle plant material. Shred leaves to use mulch. Add healthy plant material, and kitchen waste to the compost pile. Cut up winter-killed perennial plants' tops and strew on the ground beneath them as mulch.
14. Garden wisely and don't use harsh chemicals except as a last resort. Don't fill your yard with chemicals that will harm your kids, pets, and wildlife.
15. Keep a garden journal to write down your successes and failures. Record such things as varieties that did especially well in production, products that you felt improved your garden, and things that you want to buy. You can cut clippings out of magazines with ideas that you want to try in your garden. Take photos of your successes and put them in your journal.
16. Take advantage of local gardening events and Master Gardener sales and lectures, to hear seminars, buy hard-to-find plants, and get new ideas that you can use. Also take advantage of local gardeners who are usually very happy not only to share advice, but also to give you divisions of their plants.

