

How to Grow a Green Thumb By Francie McGowam

Most people think a green thumb is a special gift, like an ear for music or a talent for painting. But this is just a myth. There is nothing magical or special about people who are known as green thumbs. Beautiful gardens are the result of solid research, trial-and-error, and years of experience. Anyone interested in gardening can develop a green thumb.

The usual reason people have failures in the garden is because they put plants where they think they will look prettiest, rather than where they will thrive because of the proper light, soil conditions and water supply to nurture them. Here are three things to consider before planting a garden:

WATER

It is essential that a plant be given enough, but not too much, water. Plants with the same water needs should be planted together. Many plant tags in a nursery will give water and light needs of the plant you are buying. If a tag doesn't provide growing information, you will need to look it up online or in books, such as "Sunset Western Garden." Too little water for a plant makes it conserve what little water it has by keeping the stalk green and the roots moist, but the leaves will turn yellow and wilt, eventually drying up. Too much water will result in root rot and stunted slow growth with yellowing leaves.

SOIL

Soil is either acidic or alkaline. To find out what kind of soil you have, a simple test kit can be purchased in nurseries. Plants that grow in acidic soils, like butterfly bush, hydrangea, barberry, concordia, rhododendrons and ferns, will need to have the soil amended if it is too alkaline. This can be accomplished by adding wood ashes or oyster shell to the soil. Plants that grow in alkaline soil, like burning bush, roses, lilacs, asters and heuchera, will need to have sulphur or aluminum sulfate added to the soil to make it less acidic.

Compost is the best fertilizer for garden soils. This keeps the soil moist, inhibits bugs and weeds, and slightly adjusts the pH in the soil. If the soil lacks nitrogen, coffee grounds can alleviate the problem. Adding organic matter also helps with drainage by adjusting the structure of the soil.

LIGHT

Full sun, partial sun or shade information is an absolute for growing plants. Too much sun will burn and cause wilting in a plant. Too little sun will cause plants to be tall, spindly and pale. Knowing the plant's sun exposure needs will help you decide where to put the plant for it to thrive.

Now that you have considered these steps before planting a garden, you are well on your way to developing a green thumb. The rest is trial-and-error. Finding plants native to the area will also help you have a beautiful and thriving garden. As the seasons go by, your thumb will get greener and greener.

St. Patrick's Day is in five days and is a harbinger of spring. This is the best time to start researching and planning a garden. It is also an appropriate day to have a green thumb.

☐ **ERIN GO BRAGH!** ☐

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