

The ABCs of Glorious Gardening

It's that time of year to be outside, enjoying your yard and any containers that might be gracing your patio or balcony. Here's an easy list to set up a garden, reimagine it, or simply love on it like you always do.

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ANNUALS are flowering plants that perform an entire life cycle in one growing season and add punches of color. New colors and hybrids appear every year at local garden centers, allowing you to expand your palette, your garden's design, while increasing its beauty.

BEES & BATS can perform significant roles in your habitat – bees pollinate while bats devour mosquitoes. Little houses for both can be found in garden centers. Ask for instructions for proper placement of these houses before leaving the store as each of these critters has specific needs.

CONTAINERS can make a stunning statement in any-sized space you have and come in countless sizes, styles and materials. Gardening made easy.

DIY – You truly can “do it yourself” with tons of tips from gardening centers, newspapers, magazines, internet, HGTV, the local Cooperative Extension Agent and its Master Gardeners, public grounds like Wing Haven Gardens, and friends and family who share their wisdom.

ENJOY the natural world... it's good for your health and happiness.

FLOWERS delight the senses and bring glorious beauty. Bought by the flat, you get great value while the selection of species and color is at its peak.

GARDENS allow you to tell the world a little something about you and your personality. Go for it... express yourself. We just put in a woodland meditation garden in an unused area at the back of our property because we meditate every day. Plus we added a custom-made children's play area with swings, climbing wall, slide, ladder and rope ladder that's close to the house for grandchildren and neighbors' kids we love to have visit.

HERBS come in so many varieties and are simple to grow. Basil, chives, parsley, mint, rosemary, oregano, and rosemary are our staples. I'll add new ones soon because we like to experiment when cooking.

INVESTMENT: A garden is an investment of your time and money, but one that provides immediate payback in beauty and usefulness.

JUNE & JULY are two of my favorite months in my gardens. We got married in our back yard in 1994, so there's great sentimental value too.

KUDZU and other invasive plants grow and produce aggressively, competing with native plants, decreasing biodiversity and altering the ecosystem. Kudzu was brought to the US for erosion control early in the last century and has taken over the South. Ivy is another intrepid trespasser. Whenever possible, eliminate invasive plants in your yard.

LOT LOCATION: How does the sun move through your property? Where and when is there sun, or not? Truly, if you know the sun's trajectory, you'll be a wiser purchaser. Be sure to read the planting instructions before placing in your garden. It's simple: Shade-loving plants will thrive in shade but not the sun, and the opposite is true of those requiring full sun. Some can take partial sun or shade, so plant in the appropriate places; their tags will tell you where. Also consider how wet or dry each area is. Before you plant, check moisture requirements – some plants like to “get their feet wet” but most don't. And don't be afraid to relocate if a plant is not thriving.

MULCH is so, so important to control weeds and retain moisture, while adding neatness to your garden like icing on a cake! I use pine needles for our large natural areas, and a finer-textured mulch such as “double hammered” or finely ground pine bark chips for tender flower beds.

NATIVES are plants for this area that benefit the entire ecosystem – from microbes in the soil to the plants, insects, birds, and everything in between. Ask for natives; selection is growing due to increased awareness of their critical role in preserving our fragile and precious environment.

OUTDOORS is there for play and contemplation. Experience it!

PERENNIALS, POLLINATORS & PRUNING are all critical to keep a garden and gardener happy. Perennials return each year to produce new foliage and flowers after dying off above ground during winter. They also save money since they don't need to be purchased every year, and generally spread so they can be divided up, yielding more plants. Pollinators spread pollen which attracts butterflies and bees and so much more. Pruning is critical to maintaining the health and design of your plantings.

QUESTIONS can be answered, just ask the experts at gardening centers or public gardens. And ask anything of your online search engines and YouTube – there's a treasure trove of useful information just waiting for your query!

ROCKS, boulders, dry creek beds, sculpture, bird baths and houses, wind chimes, and other yard art add so much and reflect your personality.

SIMPLIFY your garden as best you can – perennials and hardy bulbs planted just once will make you rejoice!

TOOLS are absolutely essential for efficiency and enjoyment while working in your garden. Assemble these sturdy basics: Trowels, shovels, rake, hole diggers, hoses, sprayers and sprinklers, watering cans, a bucket and wheelbarrow.

UNUSUAL plants make for more interest. If you see something you like no matter how unusual, be brave and buy it for your garden.

VITAMINS & VEGETABLES: Don't forget to fertilize your plantings. And find a place for veggies. We put in two raised beds to thwart rabbits and other plant thieves, and include herbs in just about every container we have. Chinese vegetables are nutritious, easy to grow, and because many are small, require less space and are also ideal for containers.

WILDLIFE enriches our world and challenges us at the same time. Deer are the most damaging in our yard, nibbling on anything soft and budding, and the young bucks rub their velvety horns on our evergreens and fig tree. An organic spray, Deer Out, seems to be working; however, we are spraying once a week rather than the recommended monthly frequency. Rabbits, moles, voles and snails can be kept away... go online for details.

XERISCAPING is a form of gardening that's gaining in popularity by focusing on plants and gardening practices that can be maintained with low water levels, using such plants as cacti and rocks.



Xeriscaping comes from the Greek word for “dry” and would be an ideal form of gardening for high rise container gardens in Uptown Charlotte.

YEARS go by swiftly, and your yard and containers will change as you do. Savor it all.

ZEN GARDENS are a refuge that can be created in nearly any space, from a large one like we just put in that celebrates a naturally-occurring moss path leading to a boulder-strewn creek, to a tiny desktop garden for your home office. These gardens have clean, flowing lines and carefully placed objects – like the boulders and plinths we installed along the path – to calm the mind and lead all visitors to a peaceful place.

So here you have it, the ABCs of glorious gardening. May your summer be spectacular! ■

