

Growing Beautiful Landscape Plants

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Do you ever wonder how some people manage to have such beautiful plants in their gardens? Where did they find them? How do they keep them alive? We have all been jealous of our neighbors' garden at some point, but you too can create that inspiring landscape and grow beautiful and healthy landscape plants.

It all begins with selecting healthy plants at the local nursery or garden center. Most plants purchased by homeowners are grown in small plastic containers. When shopping, look for plants that have strong branches with no crossed limbs. The trunk should be straight and sturdy. The leaves should be of normal size, shape, and color for that plant species.

Check for healthy white roots to avoid girdled or pot-bound plants. The best way to do this is to carefully remove the plant from the container and examine the roots. You want to avoid plants with mechanical or insect damage or even weeds. You don't need any extra problems in the landscape. Buying plants that are suited for your growing region and that are known to have disease resistance will also help to ensure success.

Deciding where to place your new plant in the landscape is also crucial to its success. You must know if the plant prefers sun or shade, wet or dry areas, clay or sandy soils. You need to know how big this plant will get, how fast it will grow, and what its mature form will be. You need to know if it blooms, has fruit, has good fall color, or is subject to insect or disease problems. This should not discourage you from trying this new plant, but should help you plan for proper maintenance. Putting the right plant in the right place will eliminate most problems that may occur.

Properly preparing the planting area is another step in growing beautiful landscape plants. Be sure to not let the plant dry out before it is planted. Amend your soil so that it will hold moisture, while also allowing for adequate drainage. How you amend will depend on your current soil structure.

Dig a hole 2-3 times wider than the root-ball, but no deeper. Set the plant in place and backfill with the amended soil and water well. Using a root-stimulator fertilizer at planting time will also increase the plants chance of survival. Complete the project by adding a 2-4 inch layer of mulch to conserve moisture, suppress weeds and add beauty.

Remember, plants do better with heavy, infrequent watering than with daily light applications. This is a common mistake among many home gardeners. Deep watering will result in deep roots. A complete slow-release fertilizer will provide nutrients the plant needs to flourish throughout the growing season.

Follow these tips and you too can grow beautiful landscape plants. Good luck and get growing!

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Jeff Wilson is a horticulturist serving northeast Mississippi with Mississippi State University's Extension Service. Locate Southern Gardening columns and television and radio programs on the Internet at <http://msucares.com/news/>.]