

How to Choose Plants for a Garden

Explore this Article ■ **Picking Plants Suited to Your Climate**
 ■ Choosing Plants Based on Garden Conditions ■ Mixing Annuals, Perennials, and Edibles
 ■ Experimenting with Various Growing Options ■ Can I Mix Compost With Soil? ■ Expert Q&A
 ■ Tips and Warnings ■ References

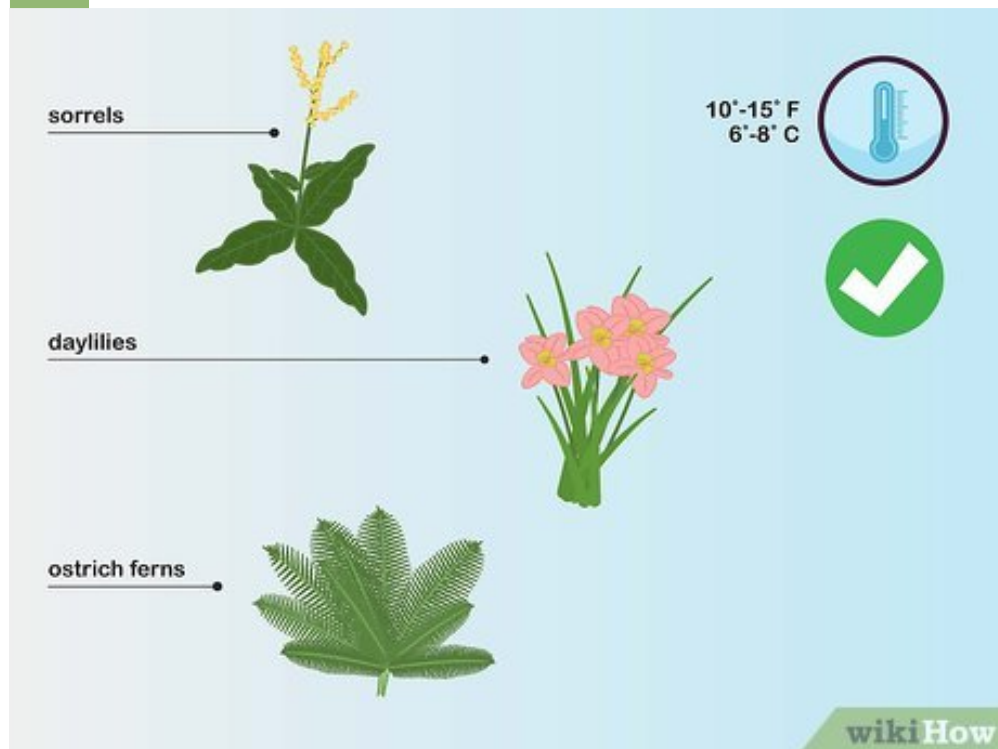
Co-authored by Ben Barkan 🌱 and 16 contributors

Last Updated: May 24, 2021

Starting a garden can be an overwhelming project, especially if you're unfamiliar with the nearly endless variety of plants out there. Before you drop a single seed, take a look at the unique conditions of your planned garden space and do some research into the kind of plants that will have the best chance of survival there. You can then pick out a few specific species that suit your tastes and tailor your cultivation methods to make sure they grow big, beautiful, and abundant.

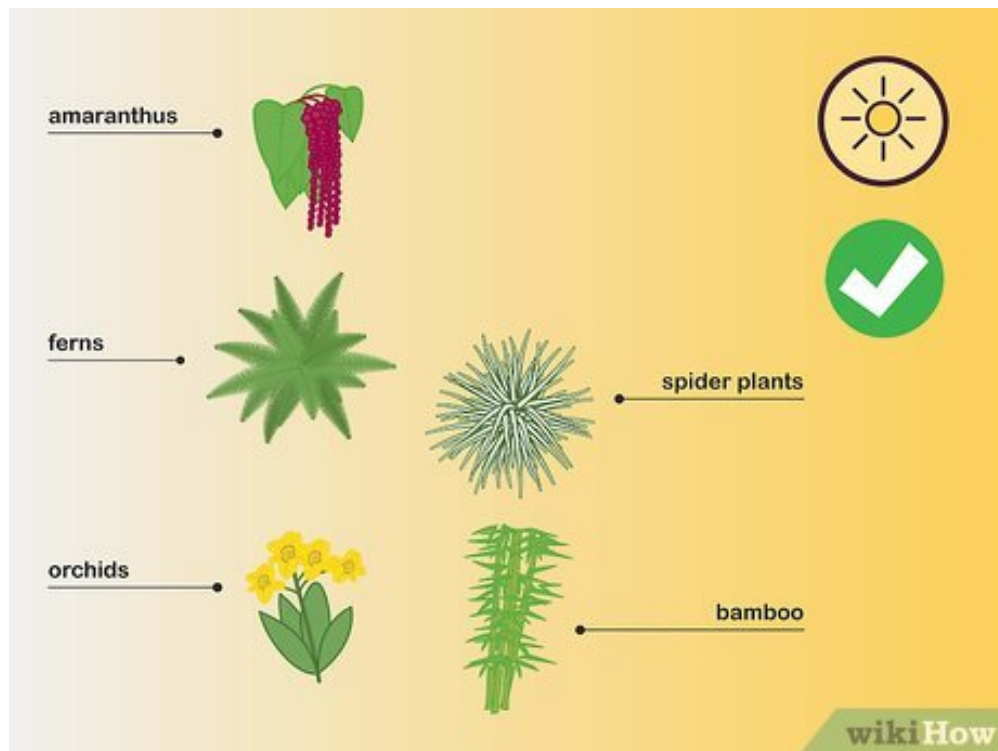
Method
1

Method 1 of 4: Picking Plants Suited to Your Climate



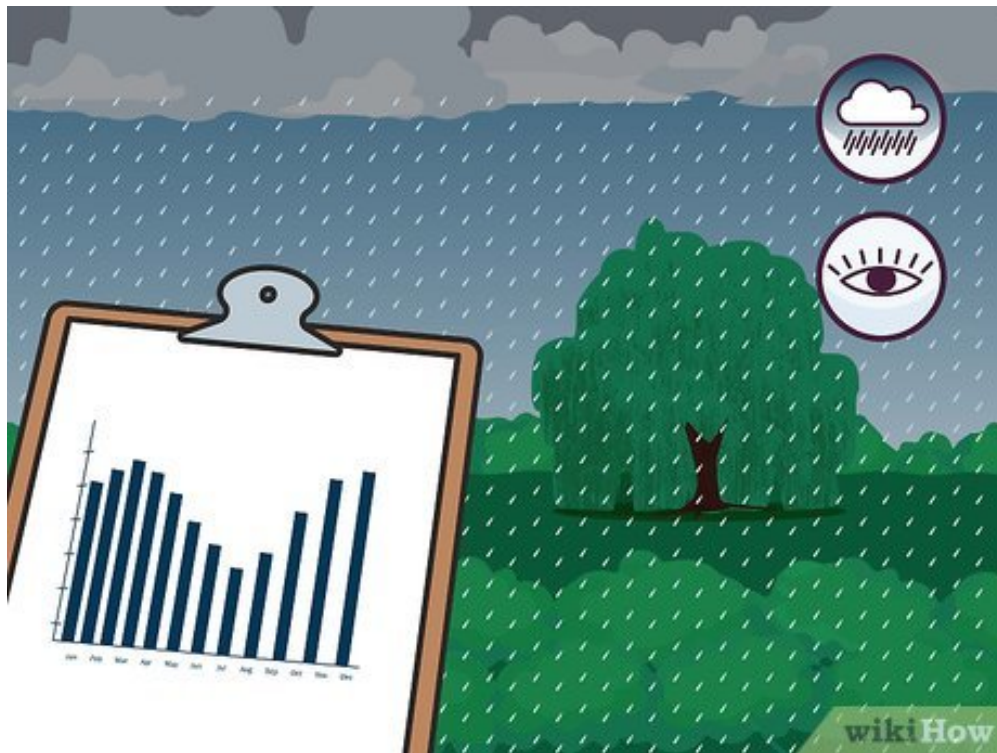
1 Plant hardy perennials in cold conditions. Gardeners in cool, temperate regions will have the best luck with resilient flowers and shrubs like sorrels, daylilies and ostrich fern. These plants are better equipped to survive low or drastically fluctuating temperatures than their warm-weather counterparts.[1]

- Plants that favor frigid conditions tend to be woody and have little colorful foliage.
- You can find more information on the different climate zones and where you fall within them online.[2]



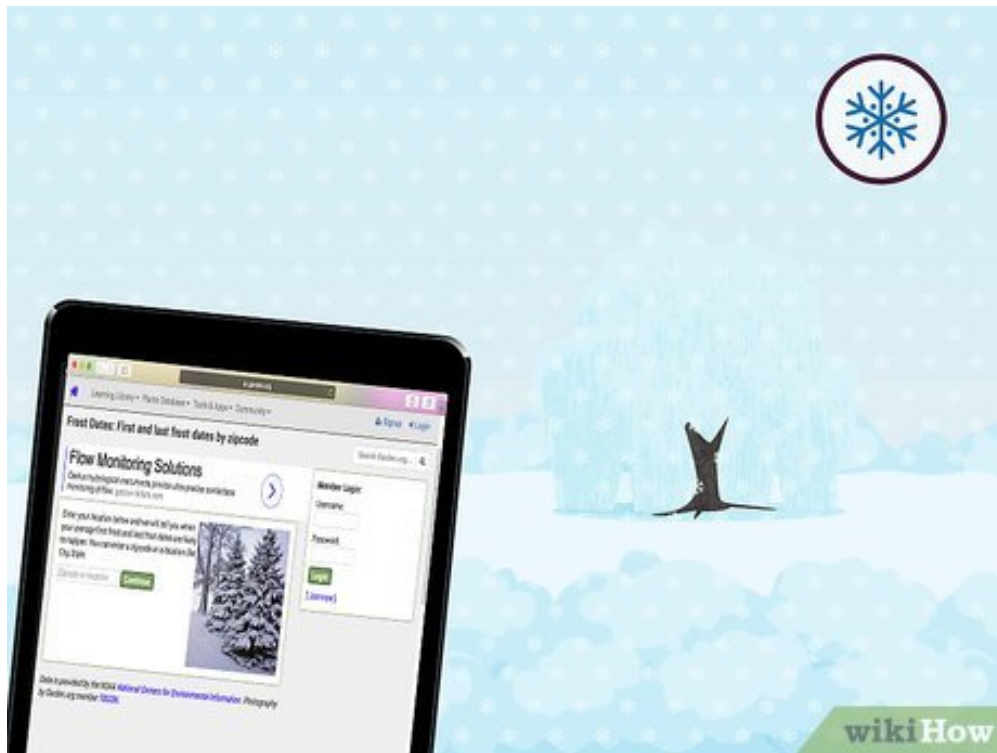
2 Grow heat-tolerant plants in tropical and subtropical climates. If you live someplace where it's warm and humid year round, stick to species that do well in steamier environments. Some good examples are amaranths, various species of ferns, and the ever-popular orchid, which can't seem to get enough heat and moisture.^[3]

- The thick, waxy leaves of spider plants and aloe make them well-adapted to warmer zones. When chosen for container gardening, you can easily shuffle them around to where the air is muggiest.
- Bamboo also has no problem finding footing in hot spots and can be strategically planted to serve as an attractive and exotic privacy hedge. Just be careful to make sure it doesn't spread out of control.^[4]



3 Take the precipitation levels in your area into account. The amount of rainfall your plants take in can play a big part in how well they ultimately do. Gardens that see regular showers usually won't be in need of much extra watering. On the other hand, your plants may benefit from 2-3 good drinks a day if they spend a lot of time drying out under the hot sun.[5]

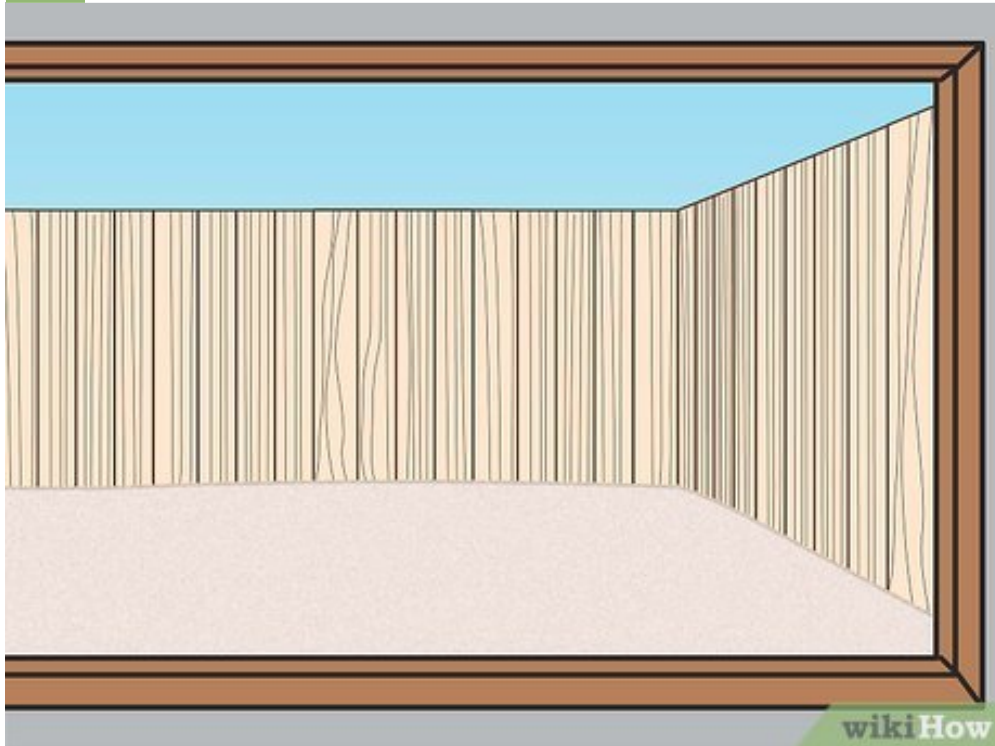
- All it takes is one good storm to drown out species like cotyledon and verbena, which don't like to get wet.[6]
- Run a quick search for the annual rainfall averages in your neck of the woods to get an idea of how frequently you'll need to water your plants.



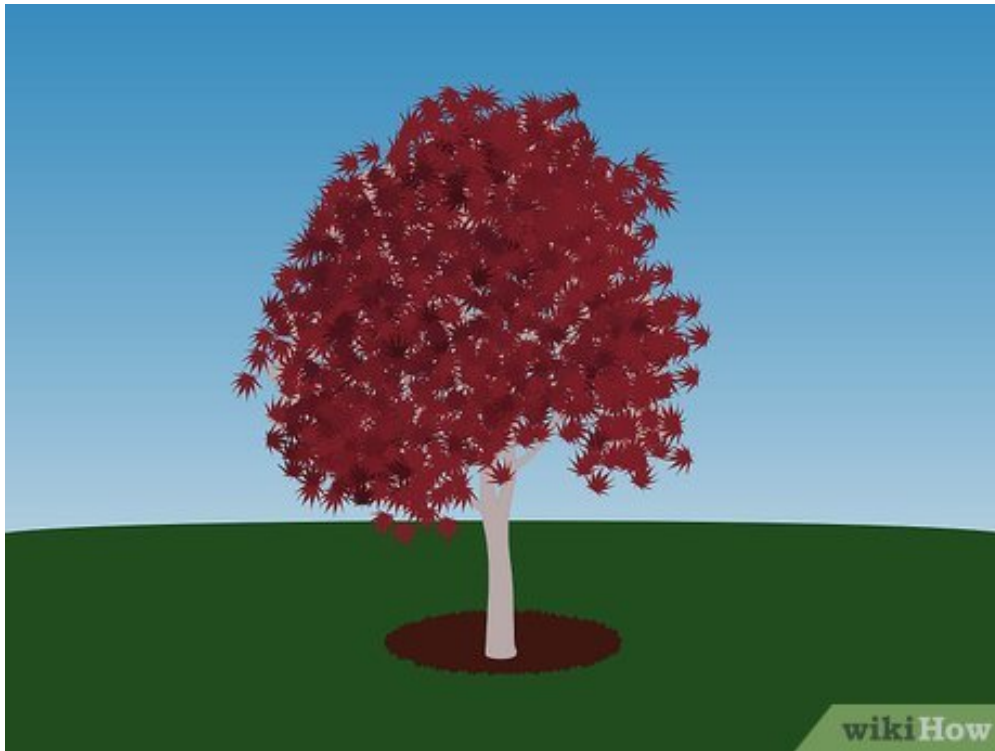
4 Plan for frost. Plug your postal code into an online frost date calculator to find out when the first and last frosts of the season are due where you live. With few exceptions, young plants respond poorly to plunging temperatures. Knowing when they're coming will allow you to plant new additions accordingly and take measures to protect the selections that are already below ground.[7]

- The National Centers for Environmental Information makes many excellent resources available to curious regional gardeners.[8]

Method 2 of 4: Choosing Plants Based on Garden Conditions



- 1 Work with the space you have available.** The overall size of your garden will be one of the biggest limiting factors in what you're able to grow there. For instance, you may only need a few square feet to put in a small annual flower bed. Raising a large garden filled with fruits and vegetables, on the other hand, will require much more ground space.
 - Consider converting one corner of your backyard into a growing site. That way, everything will be together in one place, which will make watering and pruning less of a chore.
 - Don't let a lack of square footage discourage you. It's possible to keep a thriving garden almost anywhere, as long as you're willing to get creative.^[9]



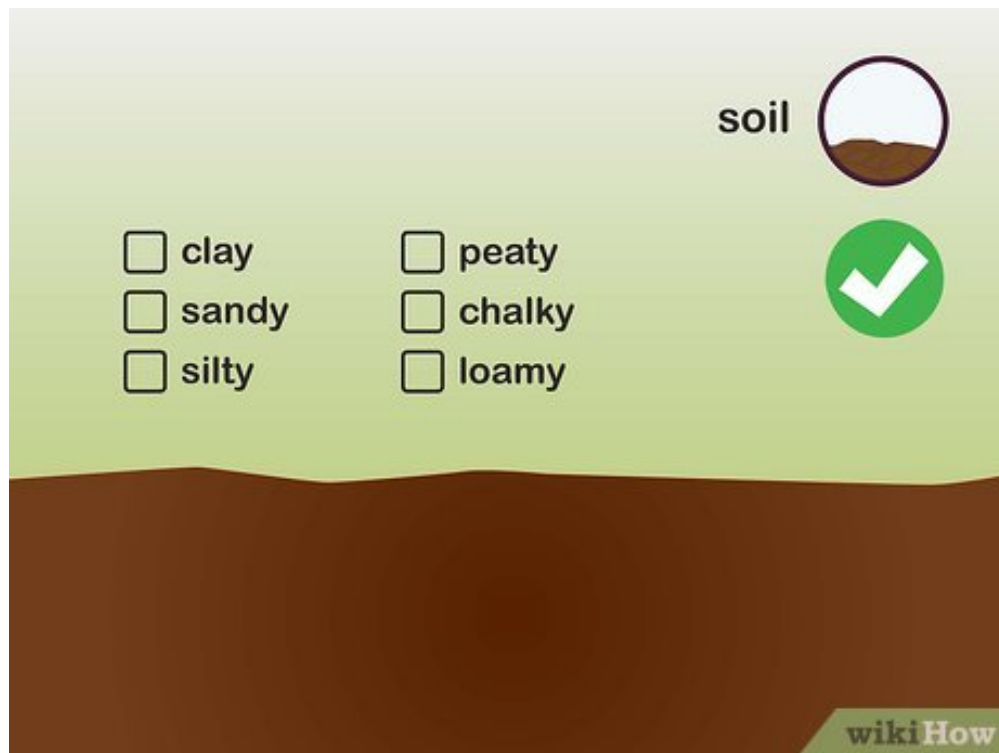
2 Plant large and fast-growing specimens if you have lots of space. Prolific growers like creeping phlox and Roman chamomile can quickly overtake modest residential gardens, leaving no room for anything else. In roomier landscapes, however, they'll fill in empty areas quite nicely and be free to spread out to their full size.^[10]

- Mid-sized trees, such as redbuds, magnolias, and Japanese maples, can be just the right size for establishing boundaries or providing natural privacy.



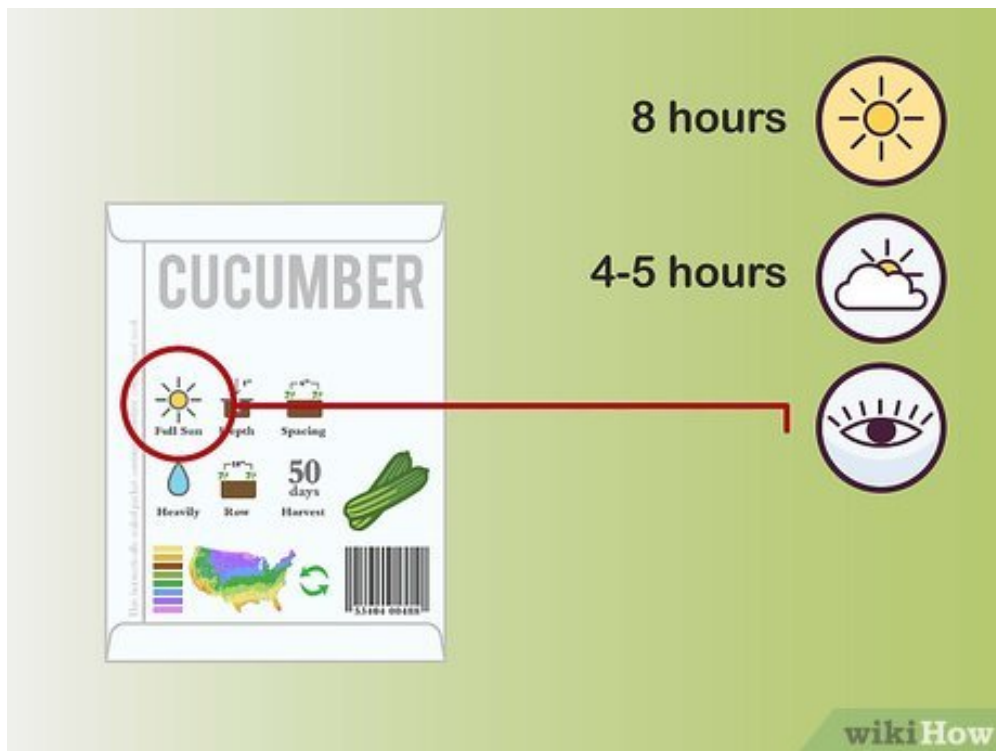
3 Try container gardening if ground space is limited. Most small flowering plants will be right at home in a pot, box, or planter. Picking up a few containers of the appropriate size can spare you the headache of reorganizing your beds in an effort to make everything fit. You can even move your containers indoors if the weather gets inhospitable.^[11]

- Make sure your containers are large enough to house the root structure of the species you're planting and have holes in the bottom for efficient drainage.
- Have fun coming up with clever container ideas. You might use an old washtub to plant a patch of petunias, or you could start a miniature herb garden in a wheelbarrow full of potting soil.^[12]



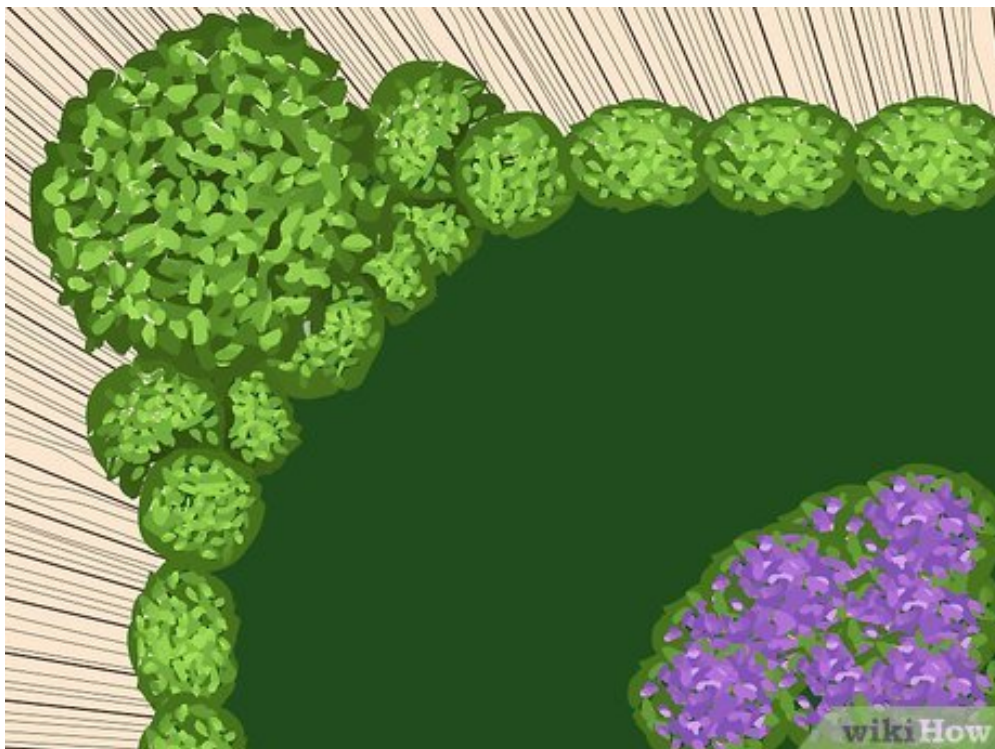
4 **Select plants that are suited to the soil at your growing site.** Is your soil overly dry and crumbly, or does it stay saturated from consistent rainfall? The answer will have an impact on which plants will be able to make it there. Keep in mind that it is possible to modify the soil conditions in your garden to a degree through the use of amendments and [drainage materials](#).^[13]

- Golden aster, sweet fern, and most succulents are examples of plants that thrive in dry soil.^[14]
- Siberian iris, forget-me-nots, and hydrangea are thirstier than most plants, and as a result are better equipped to handle marshy soil types.^[15]



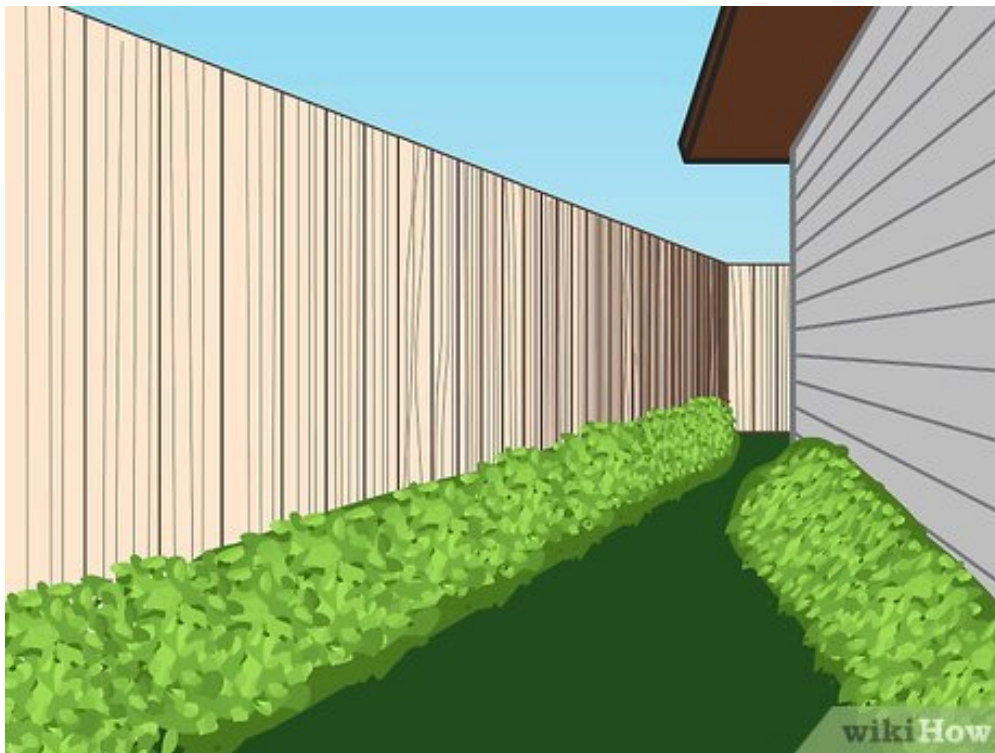
5 Observe the light levels in your garden. Make a note of roughly how many hours of direct sunlight your garden receives each day. 8 or more hours is considered full sun, while partial sun is about 4 or 5. Since plants can have such radically different light requirements, they might not all be equally suitable for your space.

- The light requirements for a given plant can typically be found on the pot or package.



6 Position light-loving plants in areas with the most sun exposure. Hearty selections such as lavender, sedum, and echinacea will happily soak up all the rays they can get. The same goes for tomatoes, lemons, and other fruits and veggies that naturally spring up where there's ample light and heat.^[16]

- Save the center of your garden for species that require higher doses of sunlight.
- Move your container plants around as needed throughout the day to increase the amount of time they spend in the sun.



7 Keep sensitive plants in full or partial shade. Hostas, begonias, and other darkness dwellers will do best when situated in dim recesses, along the base of your home or fence, or beneath other large shade plants. There, they'll be able to take in enough light to grow, but not enough to rob them of precious moisture.^[17]

- If your garden is partially shaded by trees or other structures, it could be the perfect place to plant impatiens or columbines, which are most comfortable with light that's somewhere in-between.
- Keep the soil around exposed shade plants damp to cool them off and prevent them from drying out.^[18]

Method 3 of 4: Mixing Annuals, Perennials, and Edibles



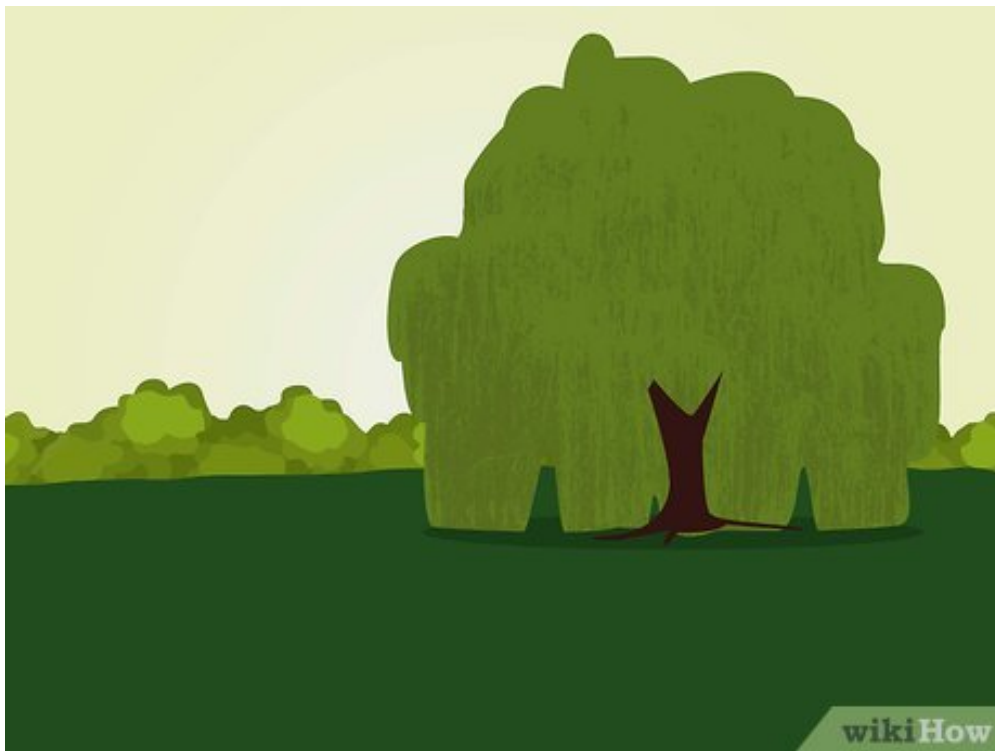
1 Plant a selection of vibrant annual flowers. Annuals like geraniums, dahlias, petunias, and zinnias are beloved for their delicate shapes and stunning coloration. Most annuals have the same basic needs and are relatively low-maintenance, which can make it easier to grow an assortment of different species together in the same space.^[19]

- Begonias, snapdragon, and marigold can all get by with minimal tending, making them a great choice for first-time growers and those who have limited time to spend in the garden.^[20]
- Mix-and-match your annuals to lay down stretches of eye-catching color. Many of the more festive varieties come in multiple shades, including reds, pinks, yellows, purples, and blues, so your options are nearly endless.



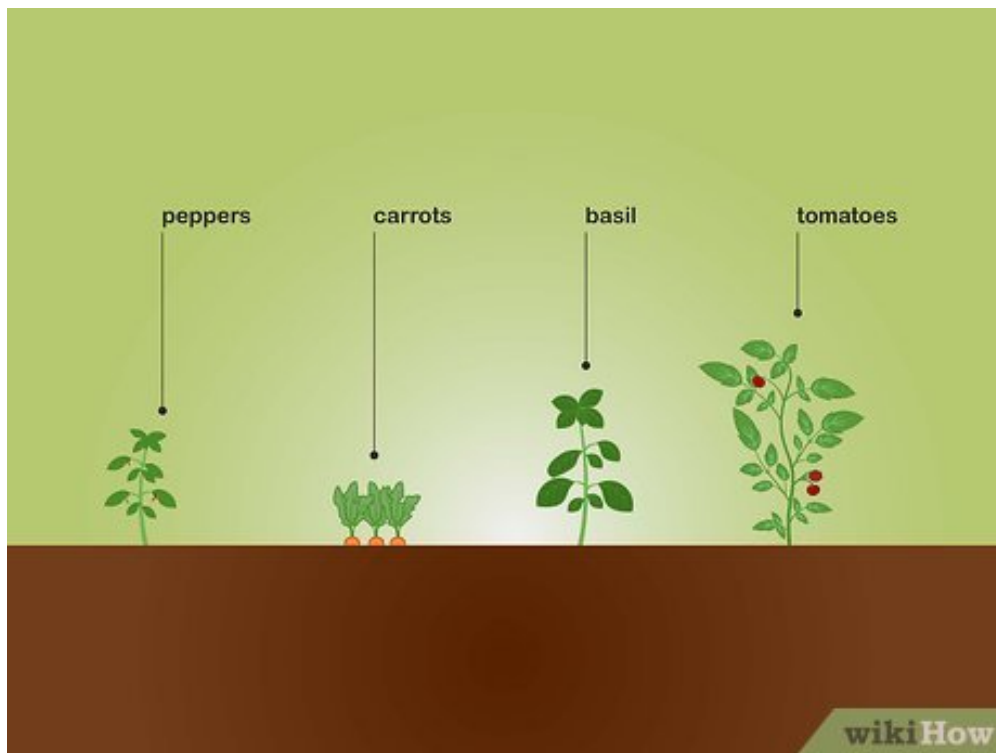
2 Put in perennial flowers and shrubs for continual beauty. Unlike annuals, which only last a single growing season, perennials are tough enough to return year after year, so long as they're properly cared for. They owe their longevity to more flexible water and nutrient requirements.^[21]

- Once plants like heuchera, grandiflorum, and Peruvian lily are in the ground, they're not very demanding.^[22]
- For many people, the fun of gardening lies in combining annual and perennial plants to create dazzling displays of shape, color, and texture.



3 Draw attention with ornamental plants. As their name suggests, ornamental species are grown primarily for decorative purposes. They're most often characterized by features like colorful blooms, unusual textures, and lush, cascading foliage, and may also bear fruit or have a pleasant aroma. One or two out-of-the-ordinary offerings could spice up an otherwise plain garden in a big way.^[23]

- Bring in a weeping willow or cluster of chrysanthemums to add a touch of natural elegance to your garden.
- Grasses and groundcover plants are useful for filling in negative space and offsetting more common flowers and shrubs.^[24]



4 Raise fresh fruits and vegetables. Rather than simply being nice to look at, edible crops provide healthy, nutritious food. A few plants can produce enough to keep you fed and cut down on the cost of going to grocery store. [25]

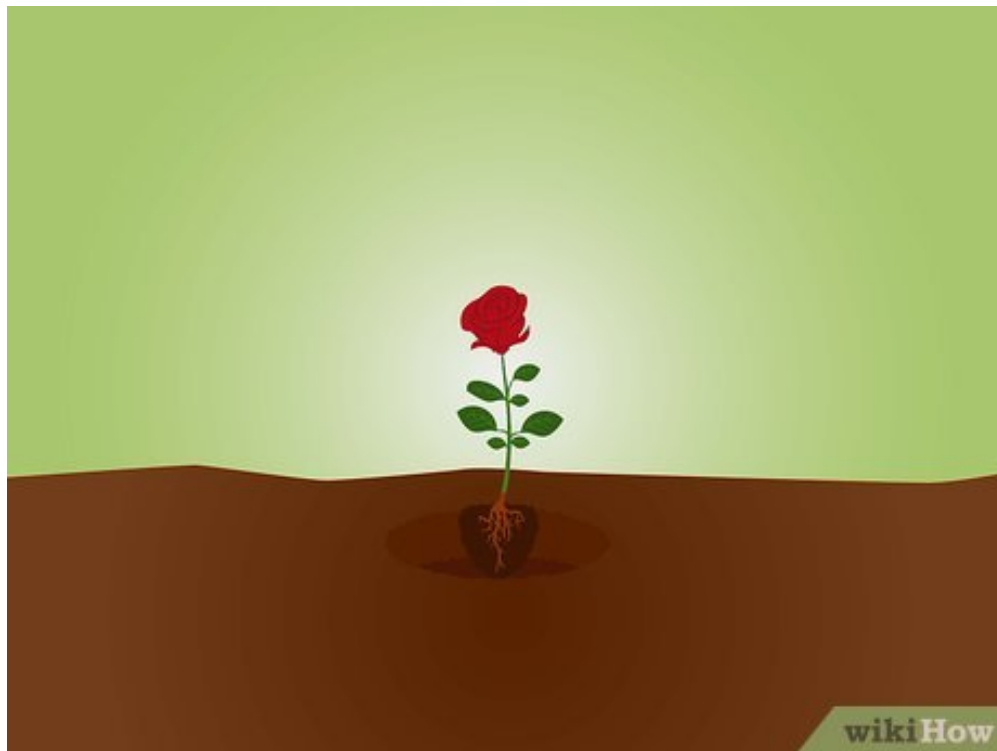
- Tomatoes, beans, melons, squash, peppers, and berries are among the most popular crops for home gardening.[26]
- If you're interested in growing both flowering plants and crops, you can reserve leftover plots for single batches of fruits or veggies after putting in your main display plants.

Method 4 of 4: Experimenting with Various Growing Options



1 Grow your plants from seeds. Head down to your local gardening center, greenhouse, or plant nursery and browse their selection of ready-to-sow seed packets. You can often find starter kits for a wide range of species, including both flowering plants and edible crops. Be sure to follow the instructions provided on the package closely to ensure that your plants are successful.^[27]

- Sunflowers, poppies, and daisies are common seed starters, along with vegetables like carrots, cucumber, radish, and cabbage.^[28]
- Raising your plants from seed can be a very rewarding experience, and is often a sign of a skilled gardener.



2 Transplant young container plants for easy cultivation. Some plants are easier to care for after they've already been started. After deciding what kind of seedling or sapling you want to grow, making room for it in your garden is as easy as digging a hole, dropping the root structure inside, and making sure its water and nutrient needs are met.^[29]

- Temperamental species like roses, boronia, and most small trees fall under this category.
- Hardening off potted plants can help them gradually acclimate to their new growing conditions. You can accomplish this by leaving them outside for an additional hour every day for 1-2 weeks, making your waterings more frequent in the meantime.^[30]



3 Keep your favorite plants going by taking cuttings. Clip the uppermost stems from flowers like roses, hydrangeas, and geraniums and place them in fresh, well-drained soil. Once they take root, dig them up and replant them alongside their parent plants. With careful attention, they'll begin to flourish on their own.^[31]

- Keep newly-planted cuttings covered with clear plastic bags to increase the humidity around them and help them grow faster.^[32]
- Propagating plants from cuttings is a cost-effective way to multiply their numbers or give them a second chance without having to start over from scratch.



4 Use helpful gardening structures to maximize your space. If you lack the room needed to cultivate adjoining plots, one practical solution is to construct raised beds that consolidate more growing room into less square footage. You may also be able to find a place for box planters and other elevated containers on walls, window ledges, or fence posts.[33]

- Stakes and trellises will allow vertical growers like tomatoes, beans, and creeping vine to move upwards rather than outwards.
- A lattice draped with wisteria or honeysuckle can pull double duty as both a space-saving measure and a means of presentation.[34]



Expert Q&A

Question

How do you decide where to plant a garden?



Ben Barkan
Garden & Landscape Designer
Expert Answer

If you live in the Northern Hemisphere, make the most of the sunlight in your space by planting taller plants on the north side of the garden. That way, they won't shade the plants on the south side of your garden as much.

Helpful ☐ 0 Not Helpful ☐ 2

Question

How do you lay out a garden?



Ben Barkan
Garden & Landscape Designer
Expert Answer

To make the most of a small space, build raised beds and make use of vertical space by planting along fences, walls, and trellises. Add nitrogen and compost to the soil to fertilize it, and focus on growing greens and herbs, since you can quickly replace those after you harvest them.

Helpful ☐ 1 Not Helpful ☐ 1

Question

What do I do with a pot bound plant?



Dathan Mitton
Community Answer

Assuming you mean "root bound," you typically remove the plant from the pot, comb out the roots, and prune off any damaged, weak or rotting roots. You then re-pot into a bigger pot for most species, or divide the plant for tuber-type plants (lilies, irises etc.).

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 2

Video [Read Video Transcript](#)



<https://www.wikihow.com/video/e/e8/Choose+Plants+for+a+Garden+Step+0+Version+2.1080p.mp4>



Tips

- Keep a notebook to record which plants are doing well and which ones aren't. That way, you'll have the option of trading out the failures for a more agreeable species come the next growing season.
- Do your homework to find out which types of plants are best suited for the unique climate and soil conditions in your area.
- Take good care of your soil. You'll be able to grow more plants in a small, healthy patch of dirt than you could in a large one with none of the right properties.

References

1. ↑ <https://www.chelseagreen.com/2015/05/21/perennial-plants-temperate-climates/>
2. ↑ <https://content.meteoblue.com/en/meteoscool/general-climate-zones>
3. ↑ <https://www.rodalorganiclife.com/garden/18-flowers-take-heat>
4. ↑ <https://www.southernliving.com/garden/perennials/how-to-grow-bamboo>
5. ↑ <https://www.provenwinners.com/learn/should-i-water-or-it-going-rain>
6. ↑ https://www.swallowtailgardenseeds.com/tips_lists/drought-tolerant-plants.html
7. ↑ <https://www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/garden-planning/how-to-find-average-last-spring-frost-date>
8. ↑ <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cdo-web/>
9. ↑ <https://www.sunset.com/garden/landscaping-design/small-space-gardening>
10. ↑ <https://www.countryliving.com/gardening/garden-ideas/how-to/g789/ground-cover-flowers-0509/>
11. ↑ <https://www.popularmechanics.com/home/lawn-garden/how-to/g59/container-gardening-460709/>
12. ↑ <https://www.southernliving.com/home-garden/gardens/creative-container-gardens>
13. ↑ <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=179>
14. ↑ <https://www.gardenersworld.com/plants/10-plants-for-dry-soil/>
15. ↑ <https://www.bhg.com/gardening/flowers/perennials/flowers-for-wet-soil/>
16. ↑ <https://www.bobvila.com/slideshow/10-sun-loving-plants-that-thrive-in-summer-44655>
17. ↑ <https://www.countryliving.com/gardening/garden-ideas/g4294/plants-for-shade/>
18. ↑ <http://www.bigblogofgardening.com/watering-plants-during-a-heat-wave/>
19. ↑ <https://www.midwestgardentips.com/best-performing-annuals/>
20. ↑ <http://growbeautifully.monrovia.com/easy-annuals-for-beginners/>
21. ↑ <https://www.bhg.com/gardening/flowers/perennials/top-perennials-for-your-garden/>
22. ↑ <https://www.sunset.com/garden/flowers-plants/best-perennials-fall-planting#sunplants-sage>
23. ↑ <https://www.commonfloor.com/guide/what-are-the-most-common-used-ornamental-plants-for-home-garden-27660.html>
24. ↑ <https://www.gardenia.net/guide/best-ornamental-grasses-and-foliage-plants-for-gardeners-in-new-england>
25. ↑ <https://www.almanac.com/vegetable-garden-planning-for-beginners>
26. ↑ <https://www.sunset.com/garden/fruits-veggies/best-vegetables-fruit-herbs-to-plant>
27. ↑ <https://www.gardeners.com/how-to/how-to-start-seeds/5062.html>
28. ↑ <https://www.mnn.com/your-home/organic-farming-gardening/stories/17-easy-to-start-seeds-for-beginner-gardeners>
29. ↑ <https://www.rodalorganiclife.com/garden/how-to-transplant>
30. ↑ <https://www.burpee.com/gardenadvicecenter/areas-of-interest/seed-starting/hardening-off-your-seedlings/article10355.html>
31. ↑ <http://www.naturallivingideas.com/25-plants-and-herbs-you-can-propagate-from-cuttings/>
32. ↑ <https://www.planetnatural.com/plant-propagation/>
33. ↑ <http://learn.eartheasy.com/2016/04/making-the-most-of-a-small-space-garden/>
34. ↑ <https://www.countryliving.com/gardening/garden-ideas/advice/g1456/fast-growing-vines/>

About This Article



Co-authored by:

Ben Barkan

Garden & Landscape
Designer

This article was co-authored by **Ben Barkan**. Ben Barkan is a Garden and Landscape Designer and the Owner and Founder of HomeHarvest LLC, an edible landscapes and construction business based in Boston, Massachusetts. Ben has over 12 years of experience working with organic gardening and specializes in designing and building beautiful landscapes with custom construction and creative plant integration. He is a Certified Permaculture Designer, is licensed Construction Supervisor in Massachusetts, and is a Licensed Home Improvement Contractor. He holds an associates degree in Sustainable Agriculture from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. This article has been viewed 56,145 times.



2 votes - 100%

Co-authors: **16**

Updated: **May 24,**
2021

Views: **56,145**

Categories: [Featured Articles](#) | [Planting and Growing](#)

<https://www.wikihow.com/Choose-Plants-for-a-Garden>

The text and visual content in this PDF is intended only for your personal, non-commercial use. Any commercial reproduction of the contents of this document without the express written permission of wikiHow, Inc., is prohibited.