

## Landscaping and Soil Preparation

### *Are you interested in a sound investment?*

In this day of inflation and high prices, anything you can do to enhance your home is like putting money in the bank. And what better way to enhance your home than through landscaping.

One of the most often overlooked aspects of the home is the outdoor living space, and in particular, the landscape. Selecting the right plants for your home should take just as much thought as selecting your drapes, wallpaper, furniture, or carpeting. Yet, often times, the homeowner regards landscaping as incidental —of secondary importance at best.



To some homeowners, landscaping is for others to do. It is enough to keep the lawn mowed and occasionally watered so that it doesn't die completely. Plants around the home become a nuisance, the care of which may interfere with a game of golf, a fishing jaunt, the bridge club, or may upset the budget when the water bill gets too high because of a summer drought.

Have you ever stopped to think that your home landscaping reflects the kind of person you are? A neat, well-groomed, functional outdoors reflects a person's pride and well-being. It usually means that the homeowner enjoys his home both inside and out, and living is meaningful and fun.

### *What about the cost of plants?*

"They can get kind of expensive," you say. While \$30 may seem like a big price to pay for a tree, just think of what a worthwhile investment you have made. While many things in life depreciate in value, plant materials in the home landscape increase in value. A \$600 sofa may be given to Goodwill Industries in 10 to 15 years, but that \$30 live oak or pecan tree may be worth 10 times the purchase price after the same period of time. A pretty good investment, don't you agree?

Of course, landscaping does not stop with the purchase of a live oak. Good landscaping does not come cheaply, even for the "do-it-yourselfer." A well-planned home should reflect a minimum investment of 10% of the value of your home. For example, if you have an \$80,000 home, approximately \$8,000 should be invested in the outdoor landscaped living area. The average homeowner is probably shocked at such an amount. However, this investment includes many facets of the landscape, such as fencing and paving for patios, etc., and not just plant materials.

Home landscaping need not be a burdensome chore. One doesn't have to be a "nut" or a hobbyist to have a nicely landscaped home. The secret is in the planning. Your home grounds can be designed so that one is not a Saturday slave to the yard.

### *Where to begin?*

A garden or an attractive landscape doesn't just happen outside of nature. They are planned. There are professional landscape designers that you may wish to consult for planning the total landscape. Or, you may wish to talk to your local nurseryman about your landscape needs and let him suggest ideas for planting. If you can't afford a complete landscape job all at once, tell him, and he can suggest a few plants for this year, some for next.

Regardless of how simple or extravagant your home may be, the landscaping will not only beautify the structure and enhance its value, but will give you a sense of pride and satisfaction in knowing that you are doing your part to improve the environment of your town and your country and make them nicer places for all of us to live.

***Continued on Back***

## ***First, Improve the Soil***



The success or health of any plant depends directly on the soil in which the plant is growing. Basically, the soil holds the plant in place in an upright position and provides necessary moisture, oxygen, and food for the plant. As simple as this may seem, many backyard soils do not supply these essentials.

The best way to assure plants of adequate moisture is to incorporate generous amounts of humus or organic materials into the soil. Organic materials such as peat moss, leaf mold, compost, processed bark, and animal manures are of a coarse texture, which ensures good soil aeration or oxygen, proper drainage or movement of water through the soil, and proper water retention, as well as prevention of soil compaction and oftentimes food.

Before adding organic or humus materials, proposed planting areas should be well spaded and worked so that all undesirable weeds and grasses are removed, and the organic additives are worked into the bed area more effectively. The organic material may be spread evenly over the surface of the cultivated soil, then turned into the soil.

## ***Evaluate Your Soil***

The amount of organic material required for a garden bed depends on the conditions of the existing soil. Heavy clay soils or very sandy soils demand greater amounts of humus or organic materials to insure proper aeration, drainage and water retention. The amount will depend on the depth and size of the proposed planting area. With experience, the gardener can feel the soil and recognize the desired tilth and soil texture for desirable plant growth. The soil should appear and feel "fluffed" and loose in texture.

Perhaps the best and most popular organic material for soils is sphagnum peat. This material is loose and coarse in texture and long-lasting in the soil. Normally, peat is bought in a compressed bale or block. Because of its dry, compressed condition, it should be spread and fluffed over the bed area, moistened, then worked well into the soil. The average soil will require 2 to 4 inches of peat over the soil surface to provide a desirable soil texture.

Animal manures, compost and leaf mold not only provide organic matter, they slowly make food available for the plant. Because they are not as coarse as peat, more is usually required for a good soil mix. Many times, when available, well-rooted manures, compost, or leaf mold is added to a peat and soil mixture.

Prepare your planting beds properly and begin to make the outside of your house as attractive as the inside. We, and especially your neighbors will appreciate it!

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*The source for this GVST Gardening Guide is Dr. Jerry Parsons, horticulturist with Texas A&M and the Texas Cooperative Extension Service in Bexar County. More information on landscaping can be found at [www.PLANTanswers.com](http://www.PLANTanswers.com).*

