



BIG ON VEGGIES Small on Space

You do not need a large plot of land to enjoy fresh, organic vegetables. Many of the most common vegetables either lend themselves to container gardening, or there are now a variety available that are created to be more compact. Almost any vegetable can be grown in a pot, and spring (now) is the best time to plant.

Select a pot that is suited for the vegetable(s) you are growing. The larger a plant grows at maturity, the larger the pot. Even tomato plants can be grown in a modest sized pot – 3-5 gallon. Have a variety of sizes to accommodate various types of plants. Be creative – just about anything can be used as a pot such as; decorative pails, coco lined wire baskets, bushel baskets, etc. Make sure that the pot has a good-sized hole at the bottom for drainage.

Place a 1-2" layer of gravel at the bottom of the pot and fill the container with a potting soil mix. Some mixes have additives like slow release organic fertilizer or moisture retaining polymers, which will help the plants and increase productivity. It will also help to cut down on the need for fertilization and watering. Plants in containers however, require more frequent watering than plants grown in the ground; especially in Southern California when the summer days can be hot.

As the season progresses and your plants mature, their root system will expand and require even more water. Don't wait until you see the plants wilting. Check your containers daily to judge the need for water.

What you can grow in a container vegetable garden is limited only by the size of the container(s) and your imagination. Look for plants labeled as "patio," "dwarf," or "great for containers." Bon Appetit!

All About the Birds and Bees... and Butterflies



When you think of natural habitats for animals, your first thought might be the "Hundred Acre Wood." However, our backyards and gardens provide a refuge for wildlife, even if on a much smaller scale. They can offer a safe haven for insects, mammals, and birds, especially when free of chemicals and pollutants. This article will focus on creating a pollen-friendly garden for hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies.

Native flora and fauna have evolved and developed over time to form a close association. The use of native plants over exotic or ornamental plant varieties has been found to offer a broader range of support for this relationship. Hybrid plants bred to be aesthetically appealing are often sterile and not useful to pollinators (birds, bees and butterflies). Therefore, it is best to choose native plants when creating a garden, especially those that are rich in nectar as well as those plants known for attracting nectar-feeding birds and insects.

Nectar is not the only factor however, in determining your plant selection. Color is also important when choosing plant materials. Hummingbirds and bees have excellent color vision and are guided by their eyes. The showy qualities of flowers and blossoms are what attract hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies. Hummingbirds are especially attracted to red-colored flowers, which is why hummingbird feeders come in the color red.



Bees are equally attracted to red flowers, but tend to be less selective. Bees also respond to a variety of flower shapes because they have different tongue lengths, depending on the species.



Bees are the most significant pollinators and are declining in population due to loss of habitat and the use of chemicals. The urban environment is a rewarding bee habitat due to the presence of a variety of flowering plants within a short flight range. Bees are also more likely to thrive in backyard gardens because of the presence of a broader range of pollen and nectar-producing plants.

Bees thrive on nectar, which is loaded with sugar; a bee's main source of energy. They also consume pollen, which is rich in fats and proteins. Single flower top plants produce more nectar. Multi-headed flowers look attractive, but produce much less nectar, making it more difficult for bees to access the pollen.

Butterflies also perform a role in the pollination process, needing both host and nectar plants to survive. The host plant is used to support the butterfly's early development (egg laying, caterpillar, and chrysalis stages), while the nectar plants support the butterfly stage.



Butterflies lay their eggs on the host plant, which develop into caterpillars that use the host plant's leaves for food. Later the fully developed butterfly will feed on the nectar from a variety of flowering plants.

The benefits of luring insects and birds to your backyard and gardens not only include intrinsic values, but also function as a balance between nature's elements. Selecting a variety of plant materials that flower at different times of the year will be beneficial in your garden because insect and bird activities occur year-round as a result of our mild winters. A mixed range of flowering trees, shrubs, and hedges also provide needed food and shelter for large insects and birds.

MULTI-DIRECTIONAL MOWING Staying Out of a Rut

Most of us have either gone to a professional baseball game or watched one on TV. If you have, you are likely to have noticed the stripes, diamonds, and checkerboard patterns of the turf in the outfield.

The practice of alternating mowing patterns, also known as lawn striping, is a simple mowing technique that leaves your lawn looking professionally manicured. In addition to the benefits of enhancing the aesthetic qualities of your lawn, it will also make it look fuller and healthier. Plus, the neighbors will be impressed.



What contributes to the striping effect? When mowing in different directions, the sunlight strikes the blades of grass, reflecting a color difference, determined by the mowing direction. The reflected sunlight gives the appearance of contrasting shades of light and dark green stripes.

The blades of grass that are bent in the direction going away from you will appear as light green stripes, while the blades of grass bent toward you will appear as a darker shade of green. Raising the mower height to cut higher will result in longer grass, which has more leaf area to lay down and will reflect more light; producing better stripes.

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Alternating mowing patterns also contributes to the health and appearance of your lawn. As you mow, the weight and motion of the lawn mower causes the grass blades to bend and lean in the direction of the mowing. Repeating the same mowing pattern week after week will not allow the grass blades to rebound to an upright position. As a result, natural air flow (aeration) is cut off, which can lead to soil compaction.

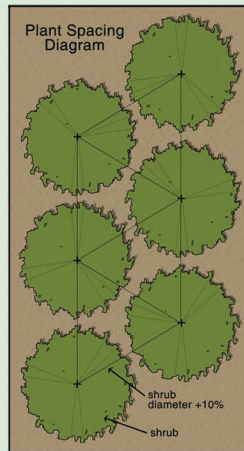
Continuous mowing in the same direction, together with the weight of the mower, contribute to lawn damage in the form of ruts, especially when the soil is wet. Rutting not only has a negative effect on the smoothness and uniformity, but also degrades the appearance of the lawn.

We use the mowing pattern variation techniques as a part of our turf maintenance practices in order to promote a strong, healthy, upright turf growth. It also helps to improve drainage and channel runoff to the appropriate location.

PROPER PLANT SPACING

The topic of proper plant spacing can often be confusing. With so many different varieties of shrubs and groundcover, remembering how much space goes between each plant can be challenging. Fortunately, there are several valuable resources available to help with the design and layout. The general rule of thumb is to space the plants according to their size at full maturity. This prevents overcrowding and allows the plants to develop in a healthy manner.

The best source for establishing a plant's full size at maturity is the *Sunset Western Garden Book*. Of the information given, a plant's mature width is the most important for proper spacing. A plant's full height is also valuable information to use with your design, allowing the smaller of the plants to take full advantage of available sunlight, while creating an optimal visual statement.



The most common plant layout technique is to use a triangular pattern (see diagram). Start by marking the first plant to be placed half the size of the shrub diameter (radius) at full maturity, plus 10%, more or less, away from the corner edges, depending on the image you are trying to create.

The next shrub would be placed a full diameter, plus 10% away from the first plant, and so on.

As the diagram shows, the center points of the shrubs form an equilateral triangle with sides equal to the shrub diameter at full maturity, plus 10%. Repeat the process for each row, adjusting as needed to fit the area being planted.

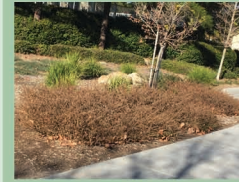
When in doubt, it is better to err on the side of caution by giving each plant more room rather than planting them closer together. Depending on the image you are trying to create, you might want to increase the spacing from 10% to 25%, to allow more autonomy for each plant, while also exposing more of the mulch groundcover.

If you are not sure what distance you want to use, lay the plants out while in their containers, which should give you a better feel.

PLANT DORMANCY

Plants, like turfgrass, go through a dormancy period in the fall and winter. However, not all plants respond to cooler temperatures in the same way. Annual plant materials, typically flowers, last for only one growing season.

Similar to trees, perennial plants are broken into two categories; evergreen and deciduous. Evergreen perennials typically flower for a short period of time, drop their flowers, but maintain a green appearance. Deciduous perennials flower or blossom for longer periods but can appear to be dead at the end of the growing season. However, with proper care, they sprout new growth in the spring and regenerate flowers and blossoms.



Deciduous perennial plants start to die back and turn brown after losing their blossoms. Once

the threat of frost has past, they should be cut back; removing most of the dead material. Cutting them back too soon can start a false regeneration process by tricking the plant into thinking it is spring. Any new growth would be susceptible to frost damage; endangering the plant.

After the risk of frost has past and mid-day temperatures become mild, you will begin to see evidence of new growth. It is about this time that normal watering practices will also resume. Remove any additional die-back materials and begin fertilization. By practicing these simple methods, you will once again enjoy the full experience of renewed plant growth.



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