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Planning a New Flower Garden **Annette Meyer Heisdorffer** **Daviess County Extension Agent for Horticulture**

Plan a family adventure in the backyard by establishing a new flower garden or redesigning an old one. Isaac and Juliann look forward to working and digging in the garden with me. Planning your garden now on paper saves time and work.

First, select the location for the flower garden. The flower garden or flower border can be planted along the edges of the yard. Gardens near or along the patio or deck bring flowers closer to your living areas. Backgrounds to accent your garden could be an old masonry wall, picket fence, open fence, privacy fence, trellis with climbing vines, evergreen shrubs, and evergreen hedges.

Next, determine if the site is located in full sun, partial shade, or full shade.

Then consider if the soil is well drained. The soil can remain moist for a period of time, but it should not remain water-soaked for long periods. Water-soaked soils do not contain enough oxygen for the roots, and the roots rot. Making a raised bed of soil, with or without a border of bricks or wooden ties, may be helpful when dealing with a poorly-drained site.

When arranging plants in the garden, usually the tallest ones are planted in the back and shorter ones near the front. Leave some space in the back of the garden so that it can be maintained without stepping on other plants.

Another garden location is an island bed which allows you to view plants from all sides. Six foot wide beds can be tended from one side or the other without stepping on plants. Most

island beds are visually more pleasing if they are at least three times longer than wide. Plant taller plants near the center of the island bed and shorter ones near the edge.

To prepare the soil for the flower garden, add two inches of organic matter such as decomposed manure or compost. Organic matter improves the aeration and drainage of the soil. Work the organic matter 8 inches deep into the soil.

The pH of the soil should be around 6.0 to 6.5 for most plants in the flower garden. The pH determines acidity (low number) or alkalinity (high number) of the soil. A pH of 7 is considered neutral. The pH is determined through a soil test, which is available through your local county Cooperative Extension Office. The report will indicate the pH and, if necessary, make the appropriate recommendation for raising the pH with lime.

A soil test will also indicate the level of phosphorous and potassium in the soil, and give recommendations for the amount of these two nutrients to add if needed. By testing the soil, you may be able to save money because the soil may not require phosphorus, potassium, or lime.

If a soil test is not conducted, then fertilize the planting site with 1 to 2 pounds of 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 per 100 square feet and work it into the soil. The three numbers on a fertilizer bag, such as 5-10-5, refer to the percentage of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium (always in this order) contained in the fertilizer. A 5-10-5 fertilizer contains 5 percent nitrogen, 10 percent phosphorous, and 5 percent potassium. Remember, it is best to have the soil tested.

Do not over-fertilize the garden with nitrogen. Extra nitrogen stimulates lush leaf and stem growth at the expense of good plant form and flower production.

After choosing the location and preparing the soil for the flower garden, select plants that prefer the growing conditions of the site. Consult horticulturists, nursery and garden center professionals, garden catalogs, books, and Extension publications for a description of the preferred growing conditions and other characteristics of the plant.

Remember to choose plants that bloom at different times of the year, especially during summer and fall. Also consider the color of the foliage and texture. Are the leaves small and fine-textured or large and coarse-textured? Texture adds interest to the garden.

Then plan on paper where to plant the annual and perennial plants, so you will have a planting guide and a record. Grouping plants in three to five of the same kind or even larger groups gives a dramatic effect. Repeating the groupings within the garden helps your eye to flow through the garden and give it unity. An individual plant, or a grouping of plants which makes a visual impact, can be used as a focal point in the garden just like a picture or piece of furniture makes a focal point in a room.

A flower garden does not have to be completed in one year. Start small and add new annuals and perennials as they catch your eye. For more information about flower gardening, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service.

Questions and answers:

How can I make mowing around flower gardens easier? When designing the shape of the flower garden, outline the edge of the garden with the lawn mower. This technique makes sure the curves and angles planned allow the mower to cut the grass in one pass. Stopping and backing up the mower to cut the missed grass takes time.

What phone number do I call to mark utility lines before I dig? Before you dig, call 811 in Kentucky. This is a one call processing center to have participating utilities mark underground lines within 2 to 10 days. For more information call 1-800-752-6007 or check the website at www.kentucky811.org.

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