

Well-laid plans lead to more successful plants

By Vicky Katz Whitaker

You've been eyeing that empty corner in the backyard all winter for a tree, some shrubs and a sweep of blooms. Choosing what plants to get and when and where to plant them can be a challenge, horticulture experts say ... if you don't plan ahead.

"The most common mistake people make is buying on impulse," observes Nicholas Staddon, director of new plants for Monrovia, a supplier of plants to more than 5,000 garden centers across North America. Not accounting for how large a plant will grow, when it will bloom and the best way to handle it before it goes into the ground can make the difference between planting success and failure, he says.

Staddon recommends doing as much research as you can before shopping for that oh-so-perfect plant to ensure you choose one that works well in the location you have in mind, the type of soil you have and your climate. "The Web is a great way to get information," Staddon says, as are books, botanical gardens and local experts. And, he adds, factor in your own lifestyle. If you want to really enjoy what you've planted, pick plants, trees and shrubs that blossom or produce unique foliage when you are going to be in the garden.

Alissa Hartman and Dreya Mancini — partners in Seed Garden Designs, a Portland, Ore.-based company that creates, installs and maintains sustainable gardens — integrate edibles into their designs, a natural way to help control

pests that are otherwise the bane of gardeners. Marigolds keep aphids from attacking broccoli, cauliflower and collard greens, and easy-to-grow nasturtiums fend off rabbits and rodents. Even better, nasturtiums are edible, Hartman points out. Another combination that is beneficial is planting onions next to strawberries; the sulfur that onions add to the soil can sweeten the fruit, she says.

Having a plan is a must, whether you draw one up yourself or use a professional, Mancini adds. Photos from magazines and advice from gardening books available at your local library and from experts at county extension services and local universities can help you develop your planting scheme. When you shop, avoid becoming what Hartman terms "a nursery junkie," picking plants that don't go together. "Buy three or four of the same kind that will work together."

Be careful, too, of buying plants that in some areas have the potential to become highly invasive and hard to eradicate, horticulture experts warn. On its website (www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/invasives.html), The United States National Arboretum provides a state-by-state list of invasive and noxious plants, including such common ground covers as periwinkle and English ivy.

Mark Hawry — a certified arborist with the North American arm of Ambius, a business landscaping supplier — offers these tips for people hunting for plants:

- **Foliage:** Leaves should be green and lush. Wilting or yellow foliage may be a sign of plant stress.
- **Shape:** Plants that are compact with multiple stems may be better than those that are bigger and taller.
- **Insects and disease:** Avoid plants with leaves that show leaf spot, mushy areas, blackened holes, chewed edges or general distortions.

- **Root system:** Lift up the plant and check the holes in the bottom of the nursery pot. The plant may be pot-bound if there are excessive roots growing out of the bottom. If there are no roots showing, it may be immature, needing more time to grow before you take it home for your garden. If you're looking at a larger balled-and-burlapped plant, make sure the root ball is solid, without loose soil.

- **Stem damage:** If the plant has a woody stem, there shouldn't be any cracks or scars.

- **Buds and flowers:** Plants with flower buds will transplant better than plants in full bloom.

And pay attention to sun and shade, especially if you want a colorful planting area, says **Bill Calkins**, independent garden center manager for Illinois-based **Ball Horticultural Co.**, a worldwide breeder, producer and wholesale distributor of ornamental plants, including the **Burpee Home Gardens** brand. "Picking the correct plant to go in sun or shade is important. Sun-loving plants won't grow in shade, and shade lovers won't flower in full sun."

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Creators.com photo courtesy of Monrovia

Choosing plants that bloom when you can enjoy them most should be considered when planning a garden, according to Nicholas Staddon.



Creators.com photo courtesy of Seed Garden Designs

Marigolds are one of many companion plants that deter pests from damaging other plants in your garden.

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