



The Lazy Gardener

Efficiency in the Garden

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Good Gardening Practices (to reduce maintenance needs)

- Select the right plant for the location.
Many gardeners try to 'fix' their yard so they can grow plants that have difficult needs. The easier method is to select plants that grow in the environment offered by your yard. If you have a lot of shade, don't buy plants that require full sun. Buy shade plants and they will thrive with ease. Place water loving plants in wet places and use drought tolerant plants in dry spots.
- Select plants that have few disease and insect problems.
Some plants are prone to many problems while other plants have problems only occasionally. Stay away from plants that have many problems and the work load is lessened immediately. Among the plants that do have problems you may be able to find a variety that is disease resistant. In other words it may not get the disease common to the species or if it does get it, the problem may be less severe. Avoid plants that are overused in the landscape as they often have developed problems due to that overuse. Diversify your garden.
- Plant your plants correctly.
While this is just good common sense, too often plants do not get planted correctly. Correct planting includes putting the plant in at the same depth it was growing in the pot, planting at a time that reduces stress on the new transplant and supplying water at the time of planting to encourage root growth.
- Provide good maintenance.
No garden can exist without some care from the gardener. Too often, the care given is inadequate or improperly done. This can lead to poor plant growth. The result is that the gardener feels like work was done with no payoff. If **proper** care is given, plants grow well and the gardener is rewarded. Proper care is outlined below under maintenance shortcuts.

Maintenance & Shortcuts

- Watering: Proper watering involves providing plants with about 1 inch of water every week (rain plus watering by the gardener). It is most effective to provide that inch of water at one time, once a week. This type of deep, infrequent watering leads the plant to develop a deeper root system, so the plant is less reliant on the gardener for frequent waterings. As a result, the plant grows stronger and the gardener spends less time watering. Buy a rain gauge so you know how much water nature is providing. Watering shortcut: Use soaker hoses in the garden. Water gently weeps out of the whole length of the hose and the water goes down to the root system to benefit the plant. The gardener benefits by being able to do other things while the soaker hose runs. Another benefit is reduced water bills. When lawn sprinklers are used, as much as 50% of the water is lost to wind and evaporation. Soaker hoses do not have this loss since the water is applied directly to the soil.
- Mulching: Proper mulching involves using 2-3 inches of a mulch on the ground around the plants. Mulch should never be piled against the stems of the plants. Mulching is beneficial because it conserves water in the soil, reduces weed problems, and keeps soil temperatures from fluctuating (thus reducing stress on the plants). Mulching shortcut: Select a mulch that will last all year (like a coarsely shredded hardwood mulch) to minimize labor.
- Fertilizing: All plants need fertilizer, but too often gardeners overdo it. Consider that plants will have the biggest need in the early part of the season when they are putting on a lot of new growth. Target your fertilizer applications for May and June when they will do the most good. Follow the label directions of the particular product that you purchase for best results. Fertilizer shortcut: Don't buy a lot of different fertilizers. A general purpose fertilizer will be appropriate for almost any plant in your yard. All fertilizers have three numbers on the package (they indicate the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in the package). The numbers on a general purpose fertilizer will all be the same (10-10-10, 12-12-12, etc.) Fertilizer shortcut: Use time release fertilizers. These can be applied early in the season and the fertilizer is released over a number of weeks or months, thus reducing work for the gardener.

Gadgets and gizmos (time savers)

- Water absorbing polymers: These small crystals can be mixed into soil or potting mix at planting time. They absorb excess water and then release it slowly so that the plant has a more consistent supply of water and the gardener works less. This is especially

- useful in container gardens which tend to dry out faster than in-ground gardens.
- **Self-watering devices:** There are numerous self-watering devices available to make watering less of a chore. These devices range from containers with built in watering systems to attachments to turn pop bottles into slow watering devices. These items can be useful during vacations when the gardener is absent. For young trees and shrubs with small root balls, use an irrigation bag that delivers water directly to the root system. All the gardener has to do is fill it every few days.
 - **Grow bags:** No time to mess with containers or hanging pots? Try a grow bag instead. These plastic bags have a built in hanging strap that allows you to put it on rails, fences or hooks. The bag can be filled with potting mix and small plants (annual flowers) can be inserted into the slits cut on the front of the bag. The flowers will grow and cover the front of the bag. This item is quick and inexpensive. You can even make things simpler. Buy a bag of potting soil, lay it flat, slice it open and plant right into the bag.
 - **Grow-through ring supports:** Some plants need support and providing support can be troublesome and unsightly. Grow-through rings can reduce the work and keep the garden looking tidy. These supports are metal rings on slender, green legs. They are placed around the plant when it is still small. As the plant grows, it grows through the ring. The ring provides support and the plant hides the ring. These are available in several sizes to fit a number of different plants. There are also other types of supports that can be placed in the garden while plants are still small.
 - **Coiled hoses (curly hoses):** Doing battle with a standard garden hose can be frustrating and time consuming. The coiled (or curly) hose is a tightly curled hose that snaps back into shape easily. It is also light weight.
 - **Strawberry jars and mini-gardens:** Strawberry jars are not new by any means , but they can be put to new uses. These clay pots have holes in their sides and were meant to allow several strawberry plants to be planted along the length of the jar. If you are short on space, but want herbs, you can plant a variety of herbs in the holes and have a mini herb garden with little work and little space required. They can also be used for annual flowers. Mini-gardens are a new twist on the strawberry jar. These are pots with several planting areas that are larger than the holes in the strawberry jar. They make instant gardens and are especially useful if you are short on space.
 - **Garden carts:** Sometimes things need to be moved in the garden. A garden cart (an updated version of the old-fashioned wheelbarrow), can make the work much easier. Many types and models are available.
 - **Tool belts and bucket belts:** These items help keep your tools handy. The tool belt straps on the gardener and the bucket belt can be strapped onto a bucket that could be use to collect clippings from the garden.

Comfort for the Gardener (to reduce stress on the gardener)

- Kneeling pads are a must to prevent sore knees. These are usually inexpensive pieces of foam. There are newer versions that contain a gel to cushion the knees. You can also strap on knee pads that go with you and are always at the ready.
- Rolling seats make it easier to get down to the plants without actually sitting on the ground or kneeling. The wheels mean you can move around without getting up.
- Garden clogs make going in and out the house much easier. They slip off easily so you can go into the house for a drink of water without bringing the whole garden in on your shoes. They can also be cleaned fairly easily.