

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

# Gardening Basics

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
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Plan and prep the  
garden of your dreams

Grow the best plants for  
your climate

Troubleshoot common  
plant problems



**Steven A. Frowine**

*Author of Orchids For Dummies*

**National Gardening  
Association**



# Gardening Basics

2nd Edition

**by Steven A. Frowine with the Editors  
at the National Gardening Association**

**for  
dummies®**  
A Wiley Brand

## **Gardening Basics For Dummies®**, 2nd Edition

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# Introduction

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Aren't you lucky! You're entering or are already part of the most popular and rewarding lifelong hobby that exists — worldwide. Gardening is a common language that knows no national, socioeconomic, or age boundaries. It's a common thread that binds all of us together. Whether you're discussing your outrageous zucchini harvest of the previous year or sharing your secret tips for prizewinning roses, you've probably found that gardeners have an instant bond, no matter what their level of experience.

Because gardening is a huge topic that encompasses a wide field of cultivation interests and disciplines, it's impossible for anyone book to cover everything there is to know about gardening. However, when you're armed with the gardening basics, like those presented in this book, you're ready for just about anything that the art and science of gardening can throw at you.

Sure, gardening requires some exertion. But it's healthy exercise. It makes you feel a great sense of accomplishment when the flowerbeds are weeded, the bulbs are planted, and the seeds are sown. It's primal. And reaping the rewards of your labor — by cutting flowers for your dinner party or fresh herbs for your salad — is a special joy that makes the noisy, electronic stimulation that surrounds you (cars, phones, and the like) seem trivial. Gardening fosters a deep satisfaction that nurtures your body and soul. That's why this book, *Gardening Basics For Dummies*, 2nd edition, exists. In addition to giving you basic pointers on how to make your gardening as successful and rewarding as possible, it's a celebration of the art and sheer joy of gardening.

# *About This Book*

In this book, I've tried to distill my more than 50 years of gardening experience as well as the knowledge of some of my other gardening friends, because everyone can discover something from each other.

I hope you find this book is fun reading: Sometimes gardeners can get way too serious about this pursuit. I've always felt that gardening is supposed to relieve anxiety, not add to it. After all, this is gardening, not brain surgery! Making a mistake (and you will) isn't a big deal. Gardens can recover quickly from our bumbling efforts to care for them. My main mission in this book is to bring you gardening success and the inimitable pleasure that comes from it. It's no fun if all your efforts end up in the compost pile.

In this second edition, look for the following:

- » A new chapter on multiplying plants
- » Revised and updated content in nearly every chapter
- » More than 50 new or revised illustrations
- » A color insert of great plants and climate maps for Canada and the United States
- » A new Part of Tens chapter for northern gardeners

Following the classic *For Dummies* format, this book gives you the most basic gardening information you need, organized and presented in an easy-to-follow, modular manner. Although you can read from cover-to-cover, you don't have to. This book can function as a reference work, so you can jump in, find what you need, and get back to your stand of birch trees or the koi pond or the garden center or wherever else you'd like to be.

After reading this book, you may not be an expert, but you should be well on your way to taking on most gardening tasks with new confidence. Gardening is part science and part art, and how you mix them up is a very personal thing. After getting a handle on the basics presented here, you can move on to develop your own style and techniques that work best for you.

As you advance in gardening, you find that in certain branches of horticulture (like perennials, some trees and shrubs, and orchids), you're confronted with dreaded scientific names (usually Latin, sometimes Greek). People use such names in these plant categories for very legitimate reasons, and you can choose to follow the path to those reasons later. For now, I spare you that step by mostly using common names for the plants throughout this book. When I do provide the scientific name, I give common plant names first, followed by the botanical name.

Even though I sometimes use the word "dirt" in this book, I must say that I remember one of my horticulture professors admonishing my class when we used this word to describe soil. He always said, "Dirt is what you sweep off the floor. Soil is that miraculous material that you grow plants in."

## ***Foolish Assumptions***

Because you're reading this book, I assume that you're ready to really love gardening. Here are some other things I assume regarding your possible background and interest in gardening:

- » You've seen other folks' gardens that have inspired you, so now you want to bring your own gardening skill to the next level.

- » You're concerned about a fresh and organic diet and want to grow some of your own herbs, fruits, and vegetables.
- » Your lawn is looking on the tattered side, so you want to spruce it up a bit.
- » You've moved into a new place, and the landscaping is nonexistent or dreadful, so you want to change it.
- » You love outdoor living and you want to improve the space around you.
- » You like the idea of gardening but don't know where to start.
- » You want to know how to multiply your own plants.

## *Icons Used in This Book*

Icons are the cute little pictures that show up in the margins of the book, right next to certain blocks of text. Here's what those icons stand for:



REMEMBER

This icon points out some major ideas in the book — stuff well worth remembering. I also use this icon to point out garden lingo you may find a bit confusing and help you identify and clarify the most common terms.



TIP

The *Tip* icon flags notable gardening information that even experienced gardeners may not know. This info can save you time and frustration.



**WARNING**

This icon alerts you to possible problems to watch out for or avoid. These problems may result in injury or at the very least a bad gardening experience.



**TECHNICAL  
STUFF**

I use this icon to point out stuff that's interesting to read but is not essential to understanding the point I'm making.

## ***Where to Go from Here***

A great thing about *For Dummies* books is that you can start anywhere you want — one part or chapter doesn't depend on any other. For example, if you're interested in growing your own fruit, head right to [Chapter 18](#). No need to start anywhere else! Scan the Table of Contents or the index, find a topic that piques your mind, and flip to that chapter.

That said, if you feel more comfortable getting a basic grounding (so to speak) in gardening before plunging right in, start with [Chapter 1](#). If you're re-evaluating or starting your garden from scratch, then any of the other chapters in [Part 1](#) are good places to begin. After that, where you go is really up to you, based on your most pressing gardening needs or pleasures.

Of course, keeping your plants alive and making them look their best involves a lot of preparation. You can then read the chapters in [Part 1](#) if you really want your plants to grow, thrive, and look their absolute best. Spending time and effort in preparation at the outset will save you lots of time and effort down the line.

If you want to read more, go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and search for “Gardening Basics For Dummies Cheat Sheet” to read a handy Cheat Sheet that you can refer to again and again.

## **Part 1**

# **Preparing Yourself (and Your Garden) for Planting**



## IN THIS PART ...

Understand the important first steps to fully realizing your garden potential.

Examine all the types of flowering plants that add color and interest to your garden as well as trees, shrubs, and vines that are important garden components.

Design and create a landscape that is the envy of your neighborhood and make a plan that fits your needs, style, and budget no matter how big or small your property is and whether it's in the sun or shade.

Understand your climate and see how you can extend your growing season.

Give your plants what they need to grow and flower to their best.

Buy the right tools for the job and know how to use them.

# Chapter 1

## Getting Ready for Gardening

---

### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding how plants are named
  - » Examining flowering plants
  - » Checking out trees, shrubs, and vines
  - » Managing your lawn
- 

No matter what your main gardening interest — be it growing vegetables, making your yard colorful with flowers, picking out just the right tree, or aspiring to have the most gorgeous roses on the block — chances are that you care most about the plants. Sure, gardening can also involve landscaping and lawn care (see the chapters in [Part 3](#) of this book), or being able to grow your own food ([Part 4](#)), or just having a great excuse to play in the dirt ([Part 5](#)), but for most people, the plants make everything worthwhile.

Okay, yeah, I know, you already know you need to plan and prepare your soil to get your garden going, but you *really* just want to read about plants right now, right? In that case, the rest of this chapter is devoted to the most basic explanations of the kinds of plants you may encounter in the world of gardening. Later chapters in this book go into much more detail about the various types of plants, trees, bushes, and vines, but here I help you get a sense of how plants are similar and different —

the first step in turning a brown thumb green. First, though, I explain a bit about names.

## ***Playing the Name Game***

What's in a name? For gardeners, plenty. Gardening is a blend of horticulture and botany, common names and high science, and the names can get a bit confusing. Whether you're looking at plant anatomy or simply want to know what to call a plant, understanding a bit about naming can help you wade through the garden center aisles, ask better questions, and treat your plants right.

### ***Getting used to plant nomenclature***

Whenever you're talking about plants, knowing how they're named can help you avoid getting tangled up in the Latin or Greek. Generally, when looking for plants and flowers, you encounter two types of names — botanical and common. Read on for some info on how the naming system works, and then *carpe diem* — *pluck the day!*



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

There is a reason why Latin and Greek are the languages used in naming plants. Latin and Greek have always been the language of scholarship, for scientists worldwide. They're unchanging, unlike the modern, daily-use language.

### ***Botanical names***

The *botanical name* is the proper or scientific name of a plant. It consists of two parts and is called a *binomial* (bi equals two, nomial equals name):

- » **The species name:** The species name is kind of like your own first name (except it comes last in a plant's botanical name).
- » **The genus name:** The genus name is similar to your family name (except in botanical names, it comes first).

For example, in the plant name *Hosta undulata*, *Hosta* is the genus name, and *undulata* is the species name. *Hosta* describes an entire genus of popular, mostly shade-loving plants named hostas, and *undulata* describes the type of hosta it is — a hosta with an undulating leaf shape.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

The singular and plural for the word *species* is *species*.

Sometimes the botanical name has a third name, right after the species name, known as the botanical variety. A botanical *variety* is a member of the same plant species but looks different enough to warrant its own name, such as *Rosa gallica* var. *officinalis*.

Still another botanical name that sometimes comes up is the *cultivar*, short for cultivated variety. Cultivars are usually named by the people who developed or discovered them, and they're often maintained through asexual or vegetative propagation for example by cuttings, seed propagation, or the most-modern method of raising large numbers of identical plants in test tubes, called *tissue culture*. In other words, they're cultivated (humans grow, improve, and develop them). An example is *Lychnis coronaria* 'Angel's Blush.' You can use or modify some of these techniques to make more plants yourself. For more details about how to, see [Chapter 10](#).



REMEMBER

A *hybrid* plant is the result of the cross-pollination between two genetically different plants, usually of the same species but different varieties. This combination can happen with human intervention, when the object is to make a new or improved plant or it can occur naturally through bee pollination between two different plants.

Botanical names are more common with some types of plants than others. For instance, you frequently run into them with herbaceous plants, trees, and shrubs but much less so with roses, annuals, and vegetables. You can find botanical names on the labels and in many garden references.

Even though botanical names can be a bit intimidating and sometimes a pain to remember, they're much more definitive than common names. They're recognized internationally so anywhere you are in the world, fellow plant lovers will know what plant you're talking about.

### ***Common names***

Common names are what you're most likely to encounter when shopping for plants to put in your garden, and they're what you mostly encounter in this book. You can find these names prominently displayed on seed packets or on seedling trays of plants that are for sale. They're kind of like botanical nicknames that gardeners use to describe a certain type of plant without going into a great amount of detail. For example, the *Hosta undulata* fits into the genus *Hosta*, so most gardeners merely refer to these plants under the common name of hostas. And you may know that *Hemerocallis* is actually the genus name for the common daylily, but chances are that most gardeners you encounter just call them daylilies.

## SHARING NAMES WITH DISTANT RELATIVES

If you want to be absolutely sure of the plant you're buying, then remember that the botanical or scientific name, including the cultivar name, is the most exact one. Some common names, like *common basil*, are very specific. All common basil has the same genus and species, *Ocimum basilicum*. However, a common name like daisy is so general that it may not be very helpful. This term can apply to plants very faintly related found in various genera (genuses). For instance, a "daisy" can be an African daisy (*Arctotis* or *Gerbera*), Dahlberg daisy (*Dyssodia tenuiloba*), English daisy (*Bellis perennis*), painted daisy (*Chrysanthemum coccineum*), Shasta daisy (*Leucanthemum superbum*), and many others. If you're shopping by common names, read labels to make sure this particular kind of plant can grow for you.

The biggest problem with common names is that the same plant can have many different common names depending on what part of the United States or the world you live in.

### ***Anatomy 101: Naming plant parts***

Beyond recognizing the names of plants, knowing the various parts of plants is also useful. [Figure 1-1](#) shows a nice, healthy perennial plant with the basic parts displayed. Botanists use many more descriptive and detailed names for plant parts, but you have enough to remember without getting further confused! You probably already know most of the common ones, but keep these parts in mind, because you need to know them to understand some of the things I discuss in the rest of this book and to speak the language with fellow gardeners. In the figure, the *taproot* (not all plants have this) is the main root of the plant; the *stolon*, or *runner*, is a horizontal stem that spreads underground, sending up more plants as it goes; many groundcovers (pachysandra, ivy, ice plant) operate this way, as anyone who has tried to tug up a patch well knows!