



COTYLEDON
CLAY



BEGINNER GARDENER MISTAKES & WAYS TO AVOID THEM

10

10 Beginner Gardener Mistakes & Ways to Avoid Them

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HEY, I'M DRIA

I'm so glad that you took the time to download this e-guide!

I'm a native Texan with a passion for helping beginner gardeners start their journey towards self-sufficiency, no matter how small. Regardless of if you have a small garden, perhaps an apartment balcony, or no garden at all. You can grow something!

Gardening can be overwhelming, especially when first starting out. I've made a lot of mistakes along the way and killed ALOT of plants.

Throughout this guide, I'll share 10 mistakes I made when I first started my garden journey, and provide tips on ways you can avoid them. If you've already made some of these mistakes, don't fret, you're in good company and maybe you'll just make less along the way.


xoxo



LET'S GROW
5

“

There are no gardening
mistakes, only
experiments.

—
Janet Kilburn Phillips



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STARTING TOO BIG TOO SOON

MISTAKE

#1



Sometimes it can be tempting to go all in and want to plant “all the things”. However, stepping waist deep into something that you have little to no understanding of, means there is a steep learning curve to overcome.

This usually means that there will be some inevitable “mishaps” along the way. Which as a reminder, is simply part of the process.

However, taking on too much too soon, can result in you feeling overwhelmed and/or discouraged. Or even worse, cause you to give up completely.



TIPS TO AVOID IT

Start off by considering your long term goals and what small steps you can take to help get you there. Focus your efforts on a manageable number of plants. What's manageable will look different from person to person. For some it may be to grow a single plant in a pot. For others, it might be to start their first raised bed that features a handful of plants.

Give yourself grace and allow yourself to make mistakes. Apply your learnings and strive to do better everyday. Once your skillset has improved and you feel comfortable, expand your efforts. Remember, progress over perfection.



COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHERS

MISTAKE

#2

We're all guilty of this! There is nothing wrong with being inspired by someone and using their success as aspiration. However, one of the most toxic things you can do to yourself is getting into the habit of comparing yourself to others. Your journey is your own and their journey is their own.

This means each is uniquely special to the individual on it. This also means that how success is defined will be different. For example, if you're someone starting off growing a few herbs on your balcony, your definition of success should be different from someone living on three acres of land and gardening to feed a family of six.



TIPS TO AVOID IT

Instead of wasting time comparing yourself to others, focus your efforts on goaling yourself to do better than you did the last time.

If you're in need of a bit of friendly competition, get in the habit of competing with yourself.

Seek to learn and don't be afraid to experiment. Even the most skilled gardeners started as beginners, and every mistake is just a step toward "ripening" your green thumb.

Celebrate your wins no matter how small and enjoy the process along the way.

“

**"Flowers do not think of
competing with the
flower next to them.
They just bloom."**

Zen Shin



PLANTING AT THE WRONG TIME

(TOO SOON OR TOO LATE)

This is one that took me a while to get a handle on and even today, I test the limits of time. The best time to plant will depend on where you live and what it is you're planting.

In the simplest terms, the best time to plant will depend on your first and last frost dates. The time between these dates is the length of your growing season. The last frost date marks the beginning of the growing season and the first frost date, marks the end.

However, certain plants like kale, onions & carrots will hold up to frosts in warmer climates, where the ground doesn't freeze & will grow through winter. However, warm weather crops like tomatoes and peppers will die with the first frost. On the flip side, plants like spinach and lettuce will begin to struggle when the weather gets too hot.



**MISTAKE
#3**



TIPS TO AVOID IT

Look up your first and last frost dates by your zip code. You can get this information here <https://www.almanac.com/gardening/frostdates>. Because these dates are based on averages, a good rule of thumb is to wait about two weeks after your average last frost date before planting outside.

When determining what to plant, play close attention to the plants' days to maturity. This is the amount of time the plant will require before it will be ready to harvest after planting.

It's important that you ensure you have enough days in your growing season to support plants' days to maturity. Most seed packets have this indicated. If not, you can do a quick google search by entering the "*the plant variety days to maturity*".

UNDERESTIMATING THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY SOIL



MISTAKE

4

Soil is literally the lifeline for all plant life. It is what feeds plants via their root system. Ensuring you are starting with the proper soil mix will set your planting efforts up for success.

In fact, soil is probably the biggest investment I've made in my garden because it's one of the most impactful inputs. The best part is that with the proper care, your soil will continuously improve over time.



TIPS TO AVOID IT

If growing in containers, most plants will grow well in a quality potting mix, amended with a bit of compost and/or an organic slow release fertilizer.

If growing in raised beds, I mix equal parts top soil, compost, and coco coir or peat moss. If you want to get fancy add in 1/4 part of vermiculite to support moisture retention and drainage.

If planting in ground, it's recommended that you send in samples of your soil for a soil test. This will identify how best to amend your soil.

NOT MULCHING

MISTAKE

#5

I love me some mulch! But that wasn't always the case. It wasn't that I didn't like mulch, I just didn't understand its importance.

Mulch aids in moisture retention; therefore, reducing the frequency of watering. It also insulates plants' roots, protecting them against extreme swings in temperature.

As mulch breaks down, it enriches the soil with organic matter, improving its structure and fertility.

Adding a layer of mulch protects soil against the sun's rays, which can deplete it of nutrients. Mulch also suppresses weeds, that might otherwise rob plants of nutrients.





TIPS TO AVOID IT

Apply about 2 inches of mulch after planting. However, avoid mulching too close around small seedlings or where you have recently planted seeds, as this can suppress growth.

Only use natural mulches like, wood mulch (undyed), dead leaves, newspaper, etc. **NO RUBBER MULCH EVER!!!**

Replenish mulch as it breaks down and/or gets displaced by things like wind and rain.



UNDER OR OVER WATERING

MISTAKE

6

It's no surprise that plants need water to survive. However, just as underwatering plants can kill them, so can overwatering.

Most beginner gardeners tend to overwater more often than underwatering. To make matters worse, the visible side effects of under and over watering are similar.

For example, yellowing and/or droopy leaves are symptoms associated with both under and over watering plants. However, crispy, brown leaf edges usually signal underwatering.

TIPS TO AVOID IT

When watering, water thoroughly and deeply. To assess whether it's time for another watering, stick your finger 1-2 inches into the soil. If it feels dry, it's time to water. If it feels moist, wait a bit longer.

To mitigate the risk of overwatering, ensure the soil is well draining. This will prevent roots from becoming water logged and rotting.

Remember, plants need less water in cooler months and more during warmer months. Additionally, if you live in an area that has frequent wind storms, this will also dry out soil much quicker. Remember to mulch outdoor plants to lessen how frequently you need to water.



“

**"The only place where
success comes before
work is in the
dictionary."**

Vidal Sassoon



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PLANTING IN THE WRONG SPOT!

MISTAKE

#7

Location, location, location. Just like plants need water to survive, they also need sunlight! However, each plant has its own sunlight requirements.

Plants like lettuce prefer soft or indirect sunlight. They will even grow in shade. However, plants like eggplant and tomatoes require full sun to truly thrive.

Keep in mind, not all sun is created equal. For example, full sun somewhere like Minnesota is a lot different than full Texas sun! If you live in a warmer climate, most plants will do well with some afternoon shade, when the sun is at its harshest.

Not meeting plants' sunlight requirements will likely lead to weak, stunted or even DEAD plants.



TIPS TO AVOID IT

Research the lighting requirements for your plants. Most fruiting vegetables will do well with 6 hours of direct sunlight per day. However, these hours don't have to be consecutive.

Remember, planting eastern facing will provide the softest sunlight, as the sun rises. Southern facing, will provide the most consistent direct sunlight throughout the day. Western facing provides the harshest sunlight, and northern facing provides the least amount of direct sunlight throughout the day.

Consider conducting a sun mapping of your growing space. This will give you a clear understanding of how many hours of sun each area of your growing space receives. A benefit of planting in containers is that you can move them around and test various locations to determine the best one.



FORGETTING ABOUT THE POLLINATORS

MISTAKE

8

Most vegetables that bear fruit require pollination from some type of pollinator. The problem I had when I first started gardening, is that I thought the pollinators would magically appear when I needed them to pollinate a particular plant. When that didn't happen, and things like my squash went unpollinated I couldn't understand why.

Imagine your garden as a buffet for pollinators. Just like people prefer a restaurant with a wide variety of delicious options. Bees, butterflies, and other pollinators are drawn to gardens that offer a diverse selection of flowers.

A garden with blooms of different shapes, colors, and bloom times is like a fully stocked buffet. If your garden only has a few flowers that bloom at the same time, it's like offering a nearly empty buffet. Pollinators may visit briefly but won't stick around.

TIPS TO AVOID IT

I make it a point to ensure I have a diverse range of flowers growing throughout my garden all season long. This ensures that pollinators have a food source, and are likely to make my garden, home.

This also means that when I need them, they're already around. If you're tight on space, I plant something I call, "pollinator islands". My pollinator islands, are simply pots filled with various flowers. I place these throughout my garden.

To choose the right flowers for pollinators, focus on plants with simple, open blooms where nectar and pollen are easily accessible. Native flowers are an excellent choice because they will attract and support local pollinator wildlife. I'm also a fan of planting perennial flowers, because they will come back for several years, meaning less work for me!





NOT FERTILIZING

MISTAKE

#9

Like us, plants need a consistent supply of nutrients to survive. Plants draw out nutrients from the soil. As they grow, they can deplete soil of its nutrients; therefore, it's important to "feed your soil".

Yes, that's right...focus on feeding your soil not your plants. That's because your soil is what feeds your plants. This is one of the key differences between organic and chemical fertilizers.

Organic, slow release fertilizers are broken down by microbes in the soil that make nutrients readily available to plants over a prolonged period of time. Whereas, chemical fertilizers tend to shoot up your plants with a high dosage of nutrients over a short period of time.

Overfertilizing is most common when using chemical fertilizers. Additionally, prolonged use of chemical fertilizers can cause a build up of salts in your soil, which can adversely impact both soil and plant health. If you do use chemical fertilizers, be sure to follow the manufacturer's application instructions.

All fertilizers should have three numbers indicated. These numbers represent the **N-P-K** (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium). Nitrogen supports green growth and aids plants in photosynthesizing and converting sun rays into energy. Phosphorus, supports blooming and fruiting. Potassium, helps plants uptake optimal nutrients and build up disease resistance.



TIPS TO AVOID IT

Research the nutrient needs of your plants. Some plants require more of one N-P-K element than another. For example, corn is an extremely heavy nitrogen feeder. However, for most plants, I find that using a fairly balanced slow-release fertilizer where each element is represented and close in value, does just fine.

Additionally, some plants are “hungrier” than others. However, I find that fertilizing every 30 days using an organic slow release fertilizer suits most plants.

However, plants like tomatoes may need supplemental feedings in between. In those instances, I use an organic liquid fertilizer, which makes nutrients immediately available to plants. However, unlike chemical fertilizers that make high doses of nutrients readily available, for example a 20-20-20 N-P-K, organic liquid fertilizers offer much lower doses of N-P-K (4-4-4).

“

**Start where you are.
Use what you have. Do
what you can.**

Arthur Ashe



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NOT UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF MY GROWING ZONE

MISTAKE

#10

A growing zone, also known as a hardiness zone, refers to a geographical area defined by its average annual minimum winter temperature. This is used to determine which plants are likely to survive and thrive in a particular area.

There are 13 total growing zones, ranging from Zone 1 (coldest) to Zone 13 (warmest). These zones, are determined by the USDA in the United States.

Knowing your growing zone is crucial because it guides you in choosing plants that are more likely to thrive in your local area. It's important to note that growing zones aren't indicative of climate.

For example, a plant best suited for Zone 9, which has mild winters, may not survive in Zone 5, which experiences harsh winters. Additionally, things like apples require a certain number of chill hours to stimulate bud break, flowering and eventual fruiting.



TIPS TO AVOID IT

Go to <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> to find your growing zone by entering your zip code.

When selecting plants, buy varieties that are suitable for your growing zone.

If this information isn't indicated on the plant's tag or the seed packet, do a quick google search by typing in the "plant variety growing zone".



NOT PLANTING WITH PLANTS' MATURE SIZE IN MIND

**BONUS
MISTAKE**

#11

When planting seedlings and plant starts, visually, things can look a bit sparse. Because of that, sometimes the urge arises to want to immediately fill in empty spaces.

However, instead of becoming fixated on a plant's current size, think about how big the plant will be at maturity. For example, in a couple of months, a 4 inch tomato plant can grow 6+ feet tall.

Planting plants too close together can hinder growth as plants compete for resources. Crowded plants are also more prone to fungal diseases due to poor airflow and create a perfect environment for pests to spread from plant to plant.



TIPS TO AVOID IT

Before planting, sketch out your garden layout, marking where each plant will go. This will help you visualize the spacing.

Always check the recommended spacing guidelines for each plant. Seed packets and plant tags usually provide guidance on how far apart to space plants. However, it's worth noting, there is usually a bit of wiggle room in these spacing guidelines.

If you direct sow seeds and they grow too close together, thin them out while they're young, leaving the strongest plants. Consider the size of the plant at maturity, including the spread of its leaves and roots, when determining spacing.

Smaller plants like lettuce will do fine with a 6" spacing, while large plants like tomatoes and zucchini will perform best with quite a bit more space (18"+) in between plants.

YOUR NOTES:



**THANKS FOR
READING!**

Happy Growing!

