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

Enjoy the outdoors and a family activity by gardening in your back yard. Plan a new flower garden or redesign an old one on paper now in order to be ready to plant when the weather is warmer and dryer. To make the garden easier to design and maintain, consider the following tips.

Start with selecting a location. The flower garden or border can be planted along the edges of the yard. Gardens near or next to a patio or deck bring flowers closer to your living areas. To accent your garden, consider using existing or newly installed backgrounds such as a masonry wall, shrubs, picket fence, open fence, privacy fence, trellis with climbing vines, or evergreen shrubs.

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 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 landscape timbers, may be helpful when dealing with a poorly-drained site.

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

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Then test the soil, which can be accomplished through your local county Cooperative Extension Service Office. A soil test will indicate the level of phosphorous and potassium in the soil, and give recommendations for the amount of these two nutrients to add if needed.

The soil test indicates the pH level also. The pH of the soil should be around 6.0 to 6.5 for most plants in the flower garden. The test report will indicate the pH and, if necessary, make the appropriate recommendation for raising the pH with 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, reputable websites for this area, Extension publications and websites 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.

Now you are ready to think about arranging the plants in the garden. Usually the tallest ones are planted in the back and shorter ones near the front. Leave 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. Place taller plants near the center of the island bed and shorter ones near the edge.

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 at 270-685-8480.

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Questions and answers:

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

What phone number do I call to mark utility lines before I dig? In Kentucky call 811. 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.

When should I cut my ornamental grass back? Cut back the foliage to about 4 to 6 inches now because new growth has started.

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