

## GARDEN MAINTENANCE TIPS AND TRICKS

*How to spend more time enjoying and less time maintaining your garden*

### 1. Select low maintenance plants:

Avoid plants that are:

- Invasive/Aggressive - Be wary of plants that spread aggressively, as they are extremely difficult to eradicate once added to your garden. Invasive plants can be prolific self-seeders (e.g., *Prunus padus*), spread by underground runners/rhizomes (e.g., *Aegopodium podagraria*, *Sorbaria sorbifolia*, *Rubus idaeus*), a combination of aggressive self-seeders/rooters (e.g., *Campanula rapunculus*), or just exhibit prolific growth (e.g., *Actinidia kolomikta*).
- Flimsy - Select cultivars that are able to support themselves without the use of staking and caging (e.g., select *Paeonia anomala* over standard garden peony cultivars).
- Prone to disease/pest issues – Select disease resistant cultivars (if available) or proactively address potential issues (e.g., improving air flow around *Aconitum x cammarum* or early treatment with a natural fungicide to prevent powdery mildew).
- Unsuited to their environment – Pushing the zonal limit on new cultivars is often irresistible to gardeners, but does not help create low maintenance gardens. Not situating plants in their optimal growing location will make it difficult for them to thrive (e.g., *Nepeta x faassenii* 'Walker's Low' thrives in full sun; planting it in a shady environment will result in leggy, flimsy growth).

### 2. Plant higher maintenance plants in smaller quantities:

- Instead of planting a large, showy annual bed, annual planters can be placed throughout the garden to add interest while reducing your work load.

### 3. Water wisely

You will have to spend less time watering if you:

- Water deeply and infrequently – Do not water every day. First, check below the soil surface for moisture. If hand watering, a good rule of thumb is to count to ten before moving the hose nozzle to a new spot in the garden.
- Target the root zone - Plants absorb water through their roots. Overhead watering via hose or sprinkler that drenches the foliage is inefficient, encourages evaporation, and promotes the spread of disease. Consider installing drip or soaker irrigation and putting the system on a timer. This does not need to be a high-tech system.

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- Reduce evaporation – Mulching (once soil temperatures have warmed) and planting to achieve good canopy coverage (i.e., reducing the amount of bare soil in your garden) will reduce evaporation (thus the need to water).

#### 4. Focus on soil health

- Soil is the foundation for a productive and healthy garden. Plants, like humans, need food to survive. You can build the store of available soil nutrients by **adding high quality compost or composted manure** to your garden on an annual basis. High quality compost/composted manure is free of weed seeds and has not been produced using diseased or pest-infested plant material.
- It is a good practice, to **periodically test your garden soil** and correct any major imbalances by adding natural soil amendments. The Cooperative Extension Service publication (available online) "*Factors to consider in selecting a soil testing laboratory*" is a great resource for where you can send soil samples for analysis. For help interpreting the results, contact your local Cooperative Extension Agent ([www.uaf.edu/ces/](http://www.uaf.edu/ces/)) or use the "*Soil test interpretation for Alaska gardeners*" resource available at ([www.uaf.edu/ces/districts/kenai/garden-calculator.php](http://www.uaf.edu/ces/districts/kenai/garden-calculator.php)).

#### 5. Stay on top of weeding and deadheading

- The old adage, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure applies in the case of weeding and deadheading (the practice of trimming spent flower heads before seeds form). Instead of feeling obliged to weed/deadhead your entire garden in one go, focus on the addressing priority areas. If you are new to gardening, start small as this will help you enjoy yourself and gain confidence without becoming overwhelmed.

HAPPY GARDENING!

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