

# DIY FLOWER GARDEN

## Getting Ready

### PREPARING YOUR GROUND

#### Necessary Elements

1. *Observe.* Start by hanging out in your yard and notice the way the sun moves. Are there microclimates with moist soil, places that warm up faster? Is there a place for you and your beloveds to sit and dream and enjoy your garden? This is of utmost importance!
2. *Find a sunny spot.* You will need a minimum of 6 hours of sunlight for your plants to grow. Afternoon shade in Arizona is a plus since the sun can get intense as the day wears on. In my low desert garden, I find that plants love the partial shade under tree canopies.
3. *Water.* You need to be able to access water from a nearby water source, and a hose that reaches to your garden patch. I highly recommend installing drip irrigation. It is not as hard as it seems! If you would like some resources on this, please ask. I have lots of drip tape I am willing to share, you just have to buy the other parts.
4. *Define your area.* Start with a small amount of space, such as a 4 x 8 foot bed. Or you can create a few smaller areas spread around your yard. I suggest grouping all of the flowers that need support together so you can stake or net them, or they can support each other!

### IDEAS FOR RAISED BEDS

I recommend using a raised bed system and filling it with good soil. Violas is selling Grow-Well raised bed garden potting soil mix 1.5 cubic ft bags for \$12. Don't bother using our native soil! It takes years to build organic matter and clear all the rocks out. (believe me I have stubbornly tried and also become a steward of some of the most beautiful soil in N. AZ). If you want success this season, just buy the bagged stuff! I believe that the only local compost supply in town is NAU surplus (behind KNAU on campus). They have a Facebook Page with a phone number. I highly recommend building your own compost for the fall! If you want to mix the raised bed soil with regular soil, Landscape Connection sells it by the yard. They say "its from a bean field." Yeah right from the same farm your parents took your dog when he got really old...

I saw these metal raised beds at my friends garden and these sacks aren't as pretty but it gets the job done.

Here's one I built. with concrete blocks. I like using them because you can fill the holes with soil and plant creeping things like thyme in them for maximizing space.



Here are others with 2 x 10' boards buffered with 4x4" corners that are buried about 6" in the ground. Then we have 4x4" posts bracing a 10 x 4' metal fence you can get from Tractor Supply or Cal Ranch. We filled these with decaying logs and



branches from our ash trees to make a Hugelkultur bed as it helps conserve soil, hold moisture and create good microbes and fungi as the wood breaks down.



The great thing about raised beds is you can take away the sides at some point later and spread the soil out to make it more natural. We planted our tulips and irises in temporary raised beds using the sheet mulch or lasagna method alternating cardboard, manure, compost and then finishing with lots of straw. Check out a great [step-by-step guide here](#). Three months later I removed the bulbs (since they are not

perennial here) and spread the yummy soil around, then planted a native seed mix to become another wing of our pollinator garden.

## PLANTING STEPS

I made [a short video](#) of planting steps that I hope will be helpful to you!

1. Harden off your plants. Before you plant keep your babies in the shade to part-sun acclimate, a little bit of sun is fine, but since they are in small containers they will dry out fast so check them a few times a day.
2. Fully hydrate the soil (and your transplants) by making several passes that soak into the lower layers of the soil where the roots live. You can even soak them in some liquid kelp/fish emulsion to help them establish more readily.
3. Planting late in the afternoon after the sun has left the scene is great to help with transplant shock.
4. Water them in right after planting. [Here's a video demo](#). Its super campy, bear with me!
5. Mulch! Covering the soil conserves water, lowers weed pressure and helps your microbial community proliferate. There are many types of natural mulch such as leaves, straw, wood chips and I have even used a mix of leaves and pine needles for my dahlias. I sometimes use landscape fabric with holes burned in it on my row crops to help with evapotranspiration and weeds, but leaves work well. You can also get [row cover](#) (which I highly recommend). I use both [9 gauge wire hoops](#) or 1/2" PVC pipe. This is a game changer to keep the plants shaded for the first month they are growing. Then you can take the cover off and watch them bloom!

## 6. PLANTING SEEDS

1. Plant to moisture. Plant seeds twice as deep as they are wide. Keep the seedbed moist. I cover my newly planted seeds with burlap fabric and then keep them covered until they germinate. (I have a whole roll of it I can sell you a few yards if you want to experiment!) For tiny seeds, like yarrow, sow them directly on the surface of the moist soil and then cover them lightly with vermiculite or peat moss.
2. Thin the seedlings once they germinate.
3. Enjoy the wonder!

## Minimizing Transplant Shock

Its tough to be a plant in Arizona. The combination of intense sun, wind and temperature swings make life pretty hard. When you move a plant from one place to another transplant shock can occur. The roots are adjusting and not able to take up water and nutrients. Here are a few things you can do to minimize transplant shock, and help your friends thrive in their new life in the ground.

- Be gentle with the roots as you get them out of the pot avoid disturbing their roots as much as possible. If they are root bound in the pot, gently loosen the rootball with your fingers.

- I water them in with liquid kelp 1 tsp per gallon. There are many brands of kelp fertilizer on the market. One I have seen that is locally available is Fox Farms Bush Doctor® Kelp Me Kelp You® seaweed plant food. I use MaxiCrop powdered kelp meal and get it from Arbico Organics in Tucson. Transplant into moist soil, in the afternoon or on a cloudy day, and use shade cloth/row cover if possible to maximize success. I

also use a mycorrhizal inoculant dispensed in a salt shaker directly on the roots when I plant.

## INSECT PRESSURE

Depending on the season, insect pressure can be an issue for your plants. Flea beetles, aphids, western flower thrips, grasshoppers and even our friends the butterflies (in their larval stage as caterpillars) all need to eat! Garden Insect Spray from Arbico Organics, which is a bacterium naturally occurring in the soil, controls many species of insects. Dr. Bronner's soap diluted in a spray bottle can help with aphids. Nolo bait is effective at knocking back grasshoppers but only when they are young. Shade cloth is also helpful at least to deter some insects (like grasshoppers), and flea beetles (mostly spring pests). The most important thing is to be observant and catch the problem early before there are several generations. Invite beneficial insects with insectary plants such as yarrow, buckwheats and Queen Anne's lace. Plant a flowering herb hedge (parsley, dill, cilantro and fennel) for ladybugs and other beneficial insects who will lay their eggs on these plants and proliferate!

## PINCHING

When I learned about pinching plants I first thought, this is so cruel! How can I lop off half of the plant that I just spent weeks growing? It takes blind faith, but believe me the delayed gratification is so worth it. Your plants will produce exponentially more stalks aka more BLOOMS (especially zinnias and dahlias)! This also translates to herbs such as basil and mint, yielding more leaves to eat! I made a short video to demonstrate this with snapdragons.

## FERTILIZING

Good news Flagstaff, compost is now available at NAU! You buy and load at the

Property Surplus (on FB) from 1-3pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and they load up your truck for you. It is \$15/yard for compost and \$18/yard for a compost/topsoil blend. Fish emulsion is also a great fertilizer with lots of nitrogen. You can mix the liquid fish according to the instructions with water and use a watering can to dispense. Do this in the morning or evening so as not to burn the leaves off of your plants!

#### MORE PLANTS

Plants for the People is a wonderful local plant source for locally plants grown with love by the botanically inclined. Molly and Jeff have edible and medicinal tea garden plants and Jeff is offering garden consulting, with an eye for permaculture. He helped me make the terraces in the pollinator garden, and is a true resource. Gayle Nance, another horticulture genius has native plants



# Flower Support and Cosmic Planting

## PLANT SUPPORT

Now that your plants are growing strong they will need support in various ways. This helps your cutting garden grow straight stems. Staking is the easiest way to achieve this. I use field fencing wire mesh cages for a small cluster of plants or I use netting from Johnny's. You can also use individual bamboo stakes and ties, or corral with posts and string. This is why we farmers plant in straight rows, but there are lots of ways to do it, just get creative. You will be happy you did it before they get too huge and fall all over each other and make curly, crazy stalks that lend themselves to Dr. Suess arrangements.

In the photo above I use old field fencing with 4-6" squares fashioned in a hoop



over a huge oregano plant. It works great for minimal support and, you can hardly see

it. I love it for the dahlias. I actually stack two on top of one another for them. Hortnova trellis netting (online at Johnny's Seeds) with wooden stakes supports straight stems. You must put the netting on before they get too big! You can use it horizontally (lisianthus on right). This also works great vertically for sweet peas, love in a puff and other climbers (sweet peas on left planted with lettuce to maximize space).



## BIODYNAMIC PLANTING

We are children of the universe and so are our plants. All living beings respond to the forces of the moon and the constellations. Planting by the moon cycle harnesses the

energy of the moon (similar to the tides). You plant annual flowers and fruit and vegetables that bear crops above ground (such as zinnias, tomatoes, jalepenos) during the waxing moon phase—from new moon to full moon. Plants plants are encouraged to grow leaves and stems as the moonlight increases night by night.

Plant flowering bulbs, biennial and perennial flowers, and vegetables that bear crops below ground (such as onions, carrots, and potatoes) during the waning moon—from the full moon until it is new again. As the moonlight decreases night by night, plants are encouraged to grow roots, tubers, and bulbs.

I am by no means a strict biodynamic farmer, however I find the practice of following these guidelines helpful. I also avoid pruning plants during the waxing moon as it nears fullness, as plants lose a great deal of moisture. Every year I buy the Stella Natura biodynamic calendar and if anything it connects me to the bigger picture like you understand why its terrible to try to make plans when Mercury is in retrograde. If you read horoscopes you will love this stuff!!!

# Harvesting and Creating with your Flowers

## HARVESTING YOUR FLOWERS

Now that your plants are blossoming there are a few tools and practices that will help your flowers have long vase life. Note, flowers will bloom more profusely if you pick them or dead head them regularly. Once they start going to seed they will stop flowering. So harvest away, my friends!

1. Use good tools. Clean snips and buckets.
2. Harvest early in the morning before its hot.
3. Let your flowers rest and drink in a cool place before arranging.

I made some videos on the [Flower Power channel](#) to help you with harvesting techniques as well as a tutorial on flower arranging.

## DRYING AND PRESERVING

One of the best things about growing flowers and herbs is that most of them can be used fresh or dried and preserved for future artistic use in wreaths or teas. The simplest and most beautiful way to dry your bounty is hang a length of wire somewhere inside out of direct sun. Bunch your stems together with like varieties with a rubber band. Then hang them on the line like laundry. Most will dry in a week or two, at which point you can put them in glass jars for later use or wrap them in plastic bags and put them in boxes or plastic bins to store for a time when you want to get witchy or crafty! I have a tutorial on the [Flower Power channel](#) about how to make your own floral wreath. You can also dry zinnias, dahlias, sunflowers and other big wet flowers with silica gel. They retain their 3-dimensional shape and then you can glue them to various surfaces with Oasis floral glue. Magic alert! You can make your kitchen or garage or closet a fragrant oasis of joy. I have turned my Sheshed at Wild Heart Farm where I employ my flower fairy skills to make fun flower-inspired art.

## DECOLONIZING OUR GARDENS

My heart breaks and rage grows with every black life that has been taken by the police. I believe we have an opportunity for us to heal deep wounds in ourselves and confront how racism is woven into our lives and we are complicit in supporting the system. I have been delving into my own ancestry and confronting how I have benefited from a system built on white supremacy. This work can start in your garden, in the soil, by taking care to not till it, use synthetic fertilizers and herbicides. These are tools of capitalism that do not support life. We can also learn about the ancestral homes where the plants we grow, eat and enjoy come from and credit the BIPOC peoples who bred and cultivated them.

A plant heroine of mine, Robin Kimmerer, suggests in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (a must read) that we stop referring to plants, who are living, animated beings as it, and adopt pronouns that honor their inherent aliveness. She adapted a new word to replace it– ki from the indigenous Potawatomi language of her ancestors, and realized that we already have the perfect word for them/they kin.

Thanks for your support, I hope you and your garden thrives beyond your wildest dreams. Remember that what you focus your effort on grows. So if your garden is a place you go every day and take care of (and it will take care of you too) then both you and your plants will grow and be healthy and beautiful!

GOOD LUCK!!