

Gardening 101

New to gardening? A warm welcome to Alden Lane Nursery. Here are some tips to get you started!

Before buying plants for your garden you want to ensure that you have a good place to put them (a border, a raised bed or sufficient sized pot) and a way to water them. Plants will not thrive if left in the pots in which you bring them home.

WHAT TYPES OF PLANTS DO WE SELL AT ALDEN LANE?

- **Trees:** evergreen, shade, flowering, drought tolerant, trees for lawns, trees for shade and privacy. We also sell a wide range of citrus and deciduous fruit trees.
- **Vines:** a woody plant with long stems. May be evergreen or lose its leaves in winter. Many have seasonal flowers. Great for using on a trellis or growing up a fence or a wall.
- **Shrubs:** a woody plant that is smaller than a tree and has several main stems. May be evergreen or deciduous. Shrubs may be grown as hedges, or create long lasting color and interest in your garden borders.
- **Perennials:** a plant that lives for more than 2 years, often longer. Commonly the top part of the plant will die back over winter and regrow the following spring. Great source of color.
- **Annuals:** short-lived plants that provide a great burst of seasonal color but will need to be replaced regularly.
- **Edibles:** a plant, such as a fruit or vegetable grown for food.

SELECTING PLANTS THAT WILL THRIVE IN YOUR GARDEN

Key points to consider when making a plant selection are:

Sun exposure

In the summer months will the border / location for your plants have:

- All day sun
- Morning sun only
- Late afternoon sun
- Full shade

Knowing this information will help narrow down your plant selection considerably. If you have any sun during the afternoon, stick to sun loving perennials, shrubs, trees and annuals. All types of roses, citrus, deciduous fruit trees, salvias and lavenders thrive in full day sun. We also have an extensive selection of plants that will be happy with half a day of sun.

Camellias, daphnes, gardenias, ferns and Japanese maples will burn in our fierce afternoon sun so place them in north facing areas of your garden or underneath the shade of a large tree.

Our sun shrubs and perennials are grouped together whilst our shade loving plants nestle in beds beneath the protection of our large oaks. Please ask a member of staff if you have any questions or help yourself to a copy of our nursery map.

Water Requirements

It is easier to successfully care for plants if you group together those with similar watering requirements - it's known as hydrozoning. Plants that like little to no summer irrigation will not thrive and indeed often die if planted alongside those that like moderate amounts of water. Likewise, plants that like weekly deep watering such as roses and trees will do better in the same irrigation zone.

A tree that likes a moderate amount of water will be happy to be located in the center of a lawn, whereas a more drought tolerant one will struggle with lawn water.



Gardening 101 (cont'd)

How can you tell if a plant is over or under watered?

Signs of overwatering are:

- Plant leaves turn yellow and drop.
- Branches turn brown and die.
- Planting hole is very wet.
- Whole plant turns brown (the roots have become saturated and the plant is likely to die).

Signs of underwatering are:

- Leaves turn brown and crinkle.
- Partial die back of branches.
- Plant shrivels and dies.

If you are unsure if a plant needs more water use a water gauge (we sell them at Alden Lane) or poke your finger a few inches down into the soil. Often the top inch or two of soil can look completely dry, but the soil slightly deeper is still very moist. This is particularly true for soils with a lot of clay.

Soil

It's good to understand your soil. Is it a heavy soil with lots of clay? Is it sandy so that water drains very quickly? Soil drainage is important as many plants that enjoy our Mediterranean climate also require good drainage. By adding a soil amendment to your planting hole (which should be dug twice as wide as the plant pot), you can ensure that these plants will thrive even in gardens with heavy clay soil. We have several soil amendments we can recommend to add to your planting hole or to your garden bed.

Some plants, in particular, camellias, azaleas, hydrangeas, citrus trees and many berries, like acidic soil, whether they are being planted in a pot, raised bed or in the ground. Our **EB Stone Azalea**, **Azalea and Acid Soil** can be used for in ground plantings as well as in pots.

A 3 inch layer of mulch is a great way to keep moisture in your soil and keep it cooler during the hot summer months. The mulch also suppresses weeds and as it breaks down, adds nutrients to the soil. For many gardeners it adds a finished look to a garden bed.

Space

How much space do you have? Take note of the mature height and width of the plant and allow it that space to grow. A plant placed in too small a space will quickly be overcrowded and require constant pruning. Always check the label as varieties of the same plant can grow to very different sizes.

Desired Aesthetics

Is it important to you to have year round interest in your garden? Consider plants and trees that will bloom or have interesting foliage throughout the year. This avoids a garden that may look beautiful in spring or summer but has no color in other seasons.

Note that you can get color and texture from interesting foliage, for example, the beautiful fiery red of a Berberis or Nandina or the chartreuse of a Coleonema pulchrum 'Sunset Gold'; indeed often the color from foliage is longer lasting than a flower that may only be in bloom for a few weeks.

Take time to consider the color palette of your garden. Blues, whites and silver create a sense of calm and restfulness in a garden. Bright pinks, yellows and oranges create heat and vibrancy.



Gardening 101 (cont'd)

Focusing on a smaller number of colors can add a sense of flow and cohesion to your garden design.

When grouping plants consider how best to balance the plants in your garden. Symmetrical balance is achieved through symmetry where you repeat plants on one side of a border on the other side. Or it can be completed by counterbalancing a large shrub or tree on one side with a grouping of smaller shrubs or perennials on the other.

Repeating plants creates a sense of flow in the garden. It also means you need to become knowledgeable about the care of fewer plants.

Starting with a blank canvas?

Begin by positioning your larger plants and any trees. Deeper borders (5 feet or more) mean you can place taller plants at the back with lower in front. In a narrower space use vines or single plants.

Next to consider are your foundation plants. Often evergreen shrubs, these plants anchor your border by providing a green focal point, no matter the season.

Deciduous flowering shrubs and perennials provide your colorful blooms and will change with the season. It's good to plant smaller perennials in groups of 3 or 5 to provide strong focal points of color.

Maintenance

No garden is truly low maintenance but the plants you choose can determine how much time is required to keep it looking good. Whether it's carpet roses that will provide endless blooms from spring through fall and require only a good sheer back every winter, a zonal geranium that requires some dead heading or a Laurus nobilis (bay laurel), we can advise you on plants that will suit your needs. Focusing on adding just a few types of plant to your garden at a time can help your confidence grow.

Additional Resources

Alden Lane does not currently offer a garden design service. However, it's knowledgeable nursery staff are very happy to make suggestions of suitable plants from our nursery to add to your garden. To meet the needs of all our customers, particularly on busy days, we do need to limit our staff time per guest. We do have a gardener design consultants referral list. You will also find useful planting lists and an extensive selection of books in our Garden Store.

Other Useful Resources

UC Master Gardener Alameda County <http://acmg.ucanr.edu>

UC Master Gardener Contra Costa County <http://ccmg.ucanr.edu>

East Bay Mud Water District <https://www.ebmud.com/water/conservation-and-rebates/watersmart-gardener/plants-and-landscapes-summer-dry-climates>

Cal Poly Tree Selection Guide <https://selectree.calpoly.edu>

