

## Summer Gardening in Texas

Lucky for us Central Texans, we can begin a garden just about anytime of year we choose. After recently moving into a new house and acquiring a huge yard, I knew I wanted to get my hands dirty and do some gardening. What to plant, when to plant, and where to plant were all mysteries to this novice. But, with the aid of the resources here at Austin Public Library and an Internet connection, I'm off to a great start.

In anticipation of our move, I first started checking out gardening books from the library that were geared toward beginners. After reading these, I was armed with a good working knowledge of gardening practices and was finally able to pinpoint my first step: choosing native plants that would thrive in my garden with minimal effort. All of the books I read advised beginners to start with the easy stuff first before tackling all of those lovely non-native plants you might want to attempt once you have honed your gardening skills.

I read up on plants that are ideally suited for our location in the *Garden Guide for Austin & Vicinity* published by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association and then began scouring the Internet. To my delight, I found a wealth of Austin-specific gardening websites where I could find everything from planting schedules for Travis County to listings of free local classes. One of my initial fears that there would be nothing to plant in summer was completely unfounded and I am gearing up for a busy summer planting season where I intend to get a number of vegetables and herbs going as well as a mini-forest of tall, huge sunflowers. To get your garden started, check out what the library and these immensely useful websites have to offer.

## Soil Testing

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You can get soil sample bags and forms from your local county extension office, the [Soil, Water, and Forage Testing Laboratory](#) at Texas A&M University, or you can print out a [Soil Sample Information Form \(PDF\)](#) and use a pint sized plastic bag as your soil sample bag.

Once you have taken the soil sample, seal it in an official sample bag or a plastic bag. Mail your sample and information sheet to the Soil, Water, and Forage Testing Laboratory along with a check or money order (made payable to Soil Testing Laboratory).

### Materials Needed

- Sample Bag (or plastic bag that will hold one pint of soil)
- Spade or [Soil Probe](#)
- Plastic Bucket
- [Soil Sample Information Form](#)
- [Urban and Homeowner Soil Sample Information Form](#)

## Take One Composite Sample From Your Yard Or More If You Have Problem Areas

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- You need approximately one pint of soil for routine analysis.
- Take a sample from 4 to 5 different spots around a section of lawn.
- Use a spade or soil probe to take samples.
- Remove soil to a depth of 3 to 4 inches below the surface.
- Put the soil into a clean **plastic** bucket and repeat in another spot.

Remove All Grass, Rocks, Twigs, Leaves, Etc. From Your Soil Sample

### Thoroughly Mix All Soil Samples Together In Plastic Bucket

### Remove A Pint Of Soil From Mixed Sample And Place In Sample Bag

Fill bag to the "Fill Line" provided. You may use a separate plastic bag if necessary, but **do not use** glass jars, metal cans of any sort, match boxes, etc... for your soil sample.

Fill out the sample bag and [Soil Sample Information Form \(PDF\)](#) and send them along with a check or money order made out to the **Soil Testing Laboratory**.

- Make sure that soil sample bag IDs match the information Soil Sample Information Form.
- Please note that the price is **per sample** and **Do Not Send Cash**.
- Be sure to keep a record for yourself of the area represented by each sample.
- Send samples and payment to:

## • It All Begins With the Soil

- Great gardens begin with great soil. Most folks don't start with ideal soil when they purchase a new property or decide to try gardening for the first time. Too sandy, too clayey, too shallow, too hard and dry, you name it and we gardeners have dealt with it on more than one occasion.
- Here in central Texas a few folks enjoy the benefits of a deep, alluvial soil alongside a river or creek. Others fight the black clay that holds water like a fish bowl when it rains, but dries like concrete when it doesn't. In summer giant cracks appear large enough to lose a small child playing out in the yard.
- Still other gardeners, especially in the western parts of the area, have large rock outcroppings on which only a thin layer of soil remains. These soils lack the depth to hold much water and are prone to drought. There are plants that are designed

to grow in such conditions, but most of our garden and landscape plants and turfgrasses are not adapted to such stressful conditions. You might as well spread a 4 inch layer of potting soil on the driveway and try to grow a lawn or flower bed on that thin layer...good luck and you better have a water hose nearby.

- The good news is that you need not settle for your lot in life! You can improve your soil and over time turn that parched patch of earth into a Garden of Eden. Most gardeners get it backwards. They buy plants and then come home and look for a place to put them. We should prepare the soil first and then those plants we spent our hard earned cash on will thrive and provide the produce, blooms or other aesthetic benefits we hoped for.
- Spend a dollar on your soil before you spend a dollar on your plants and you'll save money in the long run and have a much better garden to show for it. This section of the website provides information on soil testing, soil nutrients, fertilizing, and ways to make and use composted organic matter to grow a better soil, season after season. So dive in and get the real dirt on building better soil.

## Gardening in Harmony with Nature

*"There is more pleasure in making a garden than in contemplating a paradise."* For 60 years, the members of Austin Organic Gardeners have shared information about successfully raising vegetables and ornamentals without using harsh fertilizers that harm the soil and toxic pesticides that disturb the ecological balance. **Monthly meetings** are held the second Monday of each month at the Zilker Botanical Gardens at 7:00 P.M.

Anne Scott-James

The club's philosophy is that human and animal health depends on the health of the soil that produces their food. Healthy soil, which is rich in organic matter, abounds with organisms that convert minerals in the soil into forms plants can use. The well-nourished plants growing in these soils are better able to defend themselves against attacks from insects, diseases, and other pests.

**Check out  
what's new...**

CENTRAL TEXAS  
HORTICULTURE  
BLOG

► **Landscape Design Templates**

[http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/growgreen/landscape\\_templates.htm](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/growgreen/landscape_templates.htm)

A drought-tolerant landscape does not have to be just cactus and rocks. You can have a beautiful, colorful yard that provides great enjoyment. Most templates are from demonstration gardens around Austin so that you can also see what they look like when planted.



► **Austin School Garden Network**

<http://www.austinsgn.org/>

A collaboration of groups, agencies and individuals dedicated to reconnecting children and nature.



► **Easy to Build Weed Wiper!**

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/docs/HomemadeWeedWiper2010.pdf>

This homemade weed wiper is a very effective tool for applying a post emergence weed killer to individual weeds without bending over or using a sprayer.



► **Simple Steps to Lawn Care**

[http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/docs/Simple\\_Steps\\_Lawn\\_Care\\_2009.pdf](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/docs/Simple_Steps_Lawn_Care_2009.pdf)

Lawns can seem difficult to keep healthy in our urban environments, with our hot, drought-prone summers and our alkaline, easily compacted heavy clay soils. But there are some simple ways in which you can boost your lawn's health and avoid the problems with diseases and pests that are so common in our area.



► **How to Identify and Manage Oak Wilt**

[http://www.texasoakwilt.org/Documents/Stewardship/OakWilt\\_English.pdf](http://www.texasoakwilt.org/Documents/Stewardship/OakWilt_English.pdf)

Oak wilt is a major disease problem on live oaks, Shumard



oaks, Spanish oaks, water oaks, black jack oaks and other members of the red oak family. The successful management of oak wilt depends on correct diagnosis and an understanding of how the pathogen spreads between different oak species. ([Oak Wilt brochure](#))

► **Low Maintenance Landscaping**

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/docs/LowMaintenanceLandscapingTips2010.pdf>

Basic principles of landscaping that will focus on aspects to help reduce maintenance needs.



is a comprehensive, earthwise landscaping program to help protect and conserve Austin's water.

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/growgreen/>

**Welcome gardeners and non-gardeners alike!**  
**The Travis County Master Gardeners are here for you!**

<http://www.tcmastergardeners.org/>

<http://www.gonursery.com/>

<http://www.naturalgardeneraustin.com/>

### Books

*Doug Welsh's Texas Garden Almanac* by Doug Welsh

*Garden Guide for Austin & Vicinity* published by Travis County Master Gardener Association

This is an excellent guide to gardening in Travis County including lists of native plants, planting times, and tons of other local info.

*Gardening 101* by Martha Stewart Living

Love her or hate her, Martha and her team compile amazing, information packed guides such as this one. An excellent introduction to gardening.

*Month-by-Month Gardening in Texas* by Dan Gill

*You Grow Girl* by Gayla Trail

This was the first gardening book I read and it made gardening seem accessible to anyone. It is an enthusiastic, fresh introduction to the world of gardening. Check out her blog where you can also share your own gardening stories and seek out assistance via the forums: <http://www.yougrowgirl.com/>.

















