

## Gardening in a New Home

Buying a new home is an exciting, and sometimes overwhelming event for many. A new home is a major life change and if you're an avid gardener the contrast between your old garden and a new one can seem intimidating. Taking the time to plan out your gardening tasks is key to avoiding critical mistakes that can take years to undo.

When you first buy your house, or before if possible, examine the existing trees. Trees are a major investment and if there is a dead or dying tree on your new property it could cost you a significant amount of money. If you haven't purchased your home yet, talk with your inspector about looking at any trees on the property for low-hanging branches or dieback. Once your house is purchased, put trimming and removing trees at the top of your list. Your kitchen may desperately need new cabinets but no one will care what your cabinets look like if there's an elm tree that's crashed into your living room.

Once the existing trees are taken care of, look at the trees you want to plant next. There is an old saying that goes *"The best time to plant a tree is yesterday, but the next best time is today."* Don't wait 5 years into homeownership to plant a tree that you knew you wanted to begin with. Before planting, pick trees that are not only suited for our area but that add diversity to your yard and neighborhood. A variety of trees decreases disease and insect pressure and makes your yard a more diverse ecosystem! Preferred tree lists can be found at [www.shawnee.ksu.edu](http://www.shawnee.ksu.edu). Pay close attention to tree height and tree spread while you're selecting a new tree!

Next on your list should be any hardscaping that needs to be done. Re-building fences, a new patio or walkway should all be done before you try to tackle your new lawn. You'll be much less likely to ever re-pave your sidewalk if you spent the prior year working on flower beds on either side of it. If you're unsure as to if you want new or more hard surfaces, think about how you want to use your space in the coming years. Is entertaining in your yard a must? Or is it more important to have a grassy lawn for the kids and pets? Are there people visiting your home with mobility issues that would appreciate a smooth walkway? Or are the uneven bricks adding character that you prefer over stability?

Perennial flowers follow hardscapes. It's easiest to tackle one flower bed or area at a time. There may be existing beds that need fresh plants. Perhaps curb-appeal is important to you and there are no flowers in the front. Perennials take up more room than most annuals so allowing them to establish before over-crowding the beds will give your yard a more balanced appearance.

Lawns establishment can trail perennial flowers. Although a lush green lawn gives any yard a facelift, you want to wait until the major projects are finished before seeding a lawn. You may spend weeks seeding and watering a lawn only to decide to put a raised bed in the center, unnecessarily tearing up your hard work. Waiting for lawn work also gives you time to get a soil test and make proper amendments prior to seeding.

Weeds may be tempting to tackle as soon as you move in, but they are best left for last. Nature abhors bare soil and doesn't appreciate anyone taking away what it has put down without replacing it. Bare soil is susceptible to erosion and can have its soil structure damaged through daily activity. Allow your desirable plants to slowly crowd out the weakest weeds, leaving only the toughest for you to deal with later on.

While you wait to plant flowers and seed your lawn, don't give up on color! Containers are a great way to seasonally add color to your yard, porch or garden without the commitment of planting in the ground. Beautiful gardens take time, patience and planning. Although planting flowers right away can be tempting, a long-term garden plan will help you to create a space you can enjoy for years to come!