



# BEGINNER'S GARDEN GUIDE. ©

by





hello,

I'M CELESTE, OWNER, FARMER AND LEAD DESIGNER  
AT LADY SOUTHWEST FARM AND FLORALS

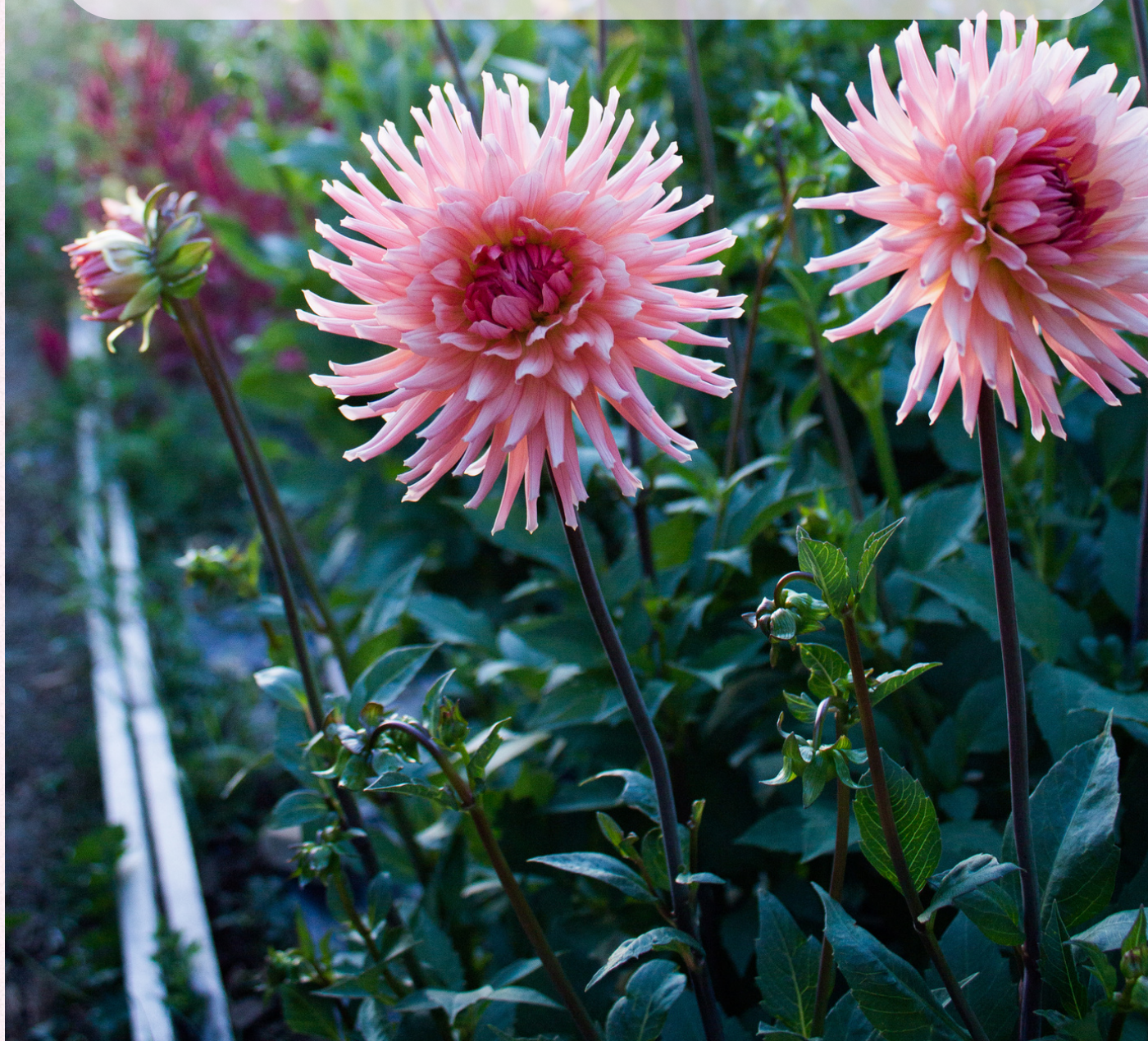
I have been flower farming and designing event florals since 2019 on a small but mighty acre in Dolores, Co. I live here with my husband, two kiddos, two cats and chocolate lab. Gardening is a calling to my soul, to the very being of who I am. I will never not have a garden. I'm glad you are here and I'm hoping I can help you start your own dream garden! This is mainly focused on cut flowers but there will be a good dig into veggies and herbs and some focus on soil health and basic gardening info so you can garden with confidence! Enjoy!





# WELCOME,

THE GOAL HERE IS TO HELP YOU LEARN HOW  
TO CULTIVATE A GARDEN THAT WILL ENRICH  
YOUR LIFE, YOUR HOME, YOUR SOUL AND YOUR  
BODY. LET'S GET STARTED!





# GARDEN TYPES

LET'S START WITH THE BASICS. THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF GARDENS AND THEIR FUNCTION OR PURPOSE. AND WHICH ONE ARE YOU WANTING?

HERBAL GARDEN: TO PRUCDE MEDICINAL, CULINARY, + MECHANICAL PLANTS. EXAMPLE: TO CREATE SOAPS, CLEANING SUPPLIES, OILS, ETC.

VEGGIE GARDEN: TO CULTIVATE PRODUCE TO SUBSTITUTE FOOD FOR YOUR FAMILY OR FOR SELF SUSTAINABILITY. SHOULD ALWAYS INCLUDE A FEW HERBS/FLOREALS FOR COMPANION PLANTING.

CUT FLOWER GARDEN: TO CULTIVATE FLOWERS FOR CUT USE. WHAT I DO! I GROW VARIETY OF CUT FLOWERS TO SELL AND DESIGN FOR WEDDINGS, ETC

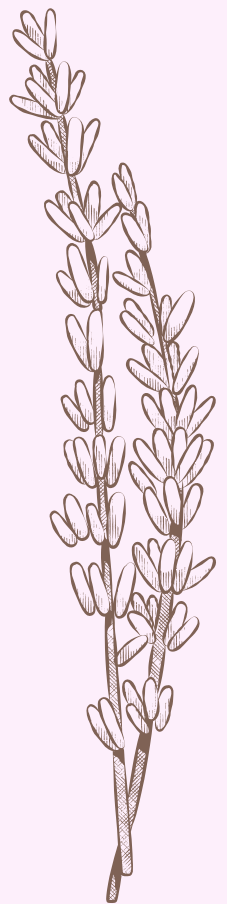
COTTAGE GARDEN: THINK ENGLISH GARDENS WITH ROSES AND TALL FOXGLOVE MAYBE MIXED IN WITH PERENNIAL VEGGIES SUCH A RHUBARB, OR FRUIT LIKE STRAWBERRIES. ANOTHER EXAMPLE ARE THE GARDENS IN THE SHIRE WITH THE GREEN THUMB HOBBITS. THIS IS A POPULAR OPTION.

FORMAL GARDEN: THESE GARDENS ARE CLEARLY STRUCTURED WITH A SYMMETRICAL FLOOR PLAN AND CLEAR PATHWAYS. CLEAN CUT. USUALLY MORE GEOMETRIC WITH SHRUBS AND PERENNIALS.

XERISCAPE: LIVE IN A PLACE WHERE YOU WANT TO BE WATER CONSCIOUS? XERISCAPE LENDS A HAND TO PLANTS THAT ARE DROUGHT TOLERANT AND EXTREMELY LOW MAINTENANCE. THINK SUCCULENTS.

TRADITIONAL GARDEN: THIS IS WHERE WE GET DUALITY. PRODUCTION AND ENJOYMENT. A GARDEN THAT PROVIDES A BLEND OF FOOD, FLOREALS, HERBS, AND IS (NOWADAYS) GOAL ORIENTED TO CREATING A MINI ECO-SYSTEM AREA WHERE HUMANS, PLANTS, INSECTS, ETC. ALL HARMONIZE. PERMACULTURE!

\*NOTE: PERMACULTURE SHOULD BE A GOAL IN ALL GARDENS!





# TERMINOLOGY

Perennial: lasting or existing for a long or apparently infinite time; or continually recurring. (oxford dictionary) In Plant world - this means the plant establishes and comes back on its own every year.

Annual: occurring once every year. Plants that need to be replanted from seed each year.

Biome: a large naturally occurring community of flora and fauna occupying a major habitat, e.g. forest or tundra. (oxford dictionary)

Aeration: Any method of loosening soil or compost to allow air to circulate.(PlanetNatural Definition)

Alkaline: A soil with a pH between 7.0 and 14 (on a scale of 0.0-14.0). Often referred to as "sweet" soil by gardeners.  
(PlanetNatural Definition)

Acidic: A soil, compost, or liquid with a pH between 0 and 7.0 (on a scale of 0.0-14.0). Often referred to as "sour" soil by gardeners. (PlanetNatural Definition)

Germination: The growth of a seed. When it finally opens up and produces a small shoot of tiny new growth after dormancy in a seed.

Hardening Off: Acclimating your indoor seedlings to the outside weather/sun so they do not die/go into total shock. This process can take a few days to a week.

N-P-K: An abbreviation for the three main nutrients that have been identified as absolutely necessary for plants are nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). These three are also known as "macronutrients," and are the source of the three numbers commonly found on fertilizer labels.  
(PlanetNatural Definition)



# IN GROUND VS. CONTAINER GARDENING

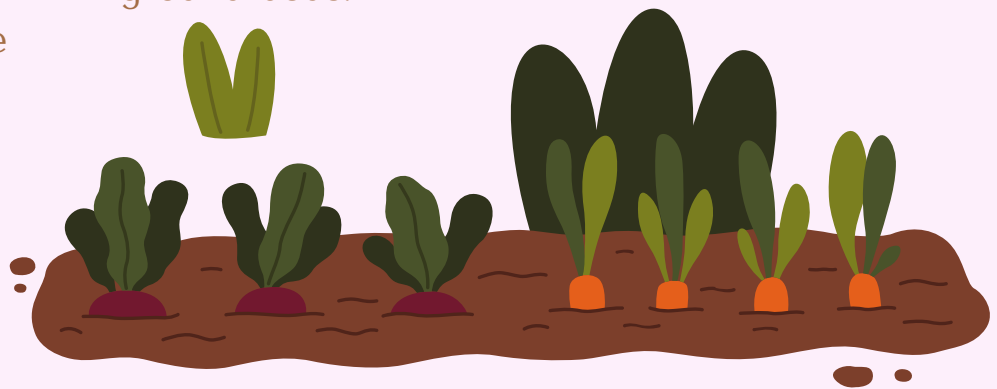


## Container Pros:

Great for smaller spaces, Instant nutrient dense and new soil. Decorative elements, organized and can help deter pests.

Container Cons: additional building time, more up front cost in materials and soils. needed repairs, some containers can restrict root growth. Harder to cover/add season extension.

In Ground Pros: much more affordable when starting. Allows for more plantable per square foot design, much easier to add nutrients and stir if needed. Easier to cover if needed or wanting to add season extensions. Can plant creative and unique designs with in ground beds. Some people prefer this more natural look. Great for large gardens/farms.



In Ground Cons: Sometimes getting the soil amended to proper desire can take years. Pests, disease, rodents and the like are a bit easier to get in here. Soil drainage can be challenging with in ground conditions compared to containers.



# SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Tight on Space? Consider vertical gardening.

Pictured below is my daughter standing under our pumpkin trellis!

We love growing things that climb! So many flowers and veggies will climb and this saves on space!  
It also has a few other lovely benefits worth noting.



## Vertical Growing Benefits:

- More air for plant, less chances of fungi, disease, pests.
- Saves space in small gardens.
- Easier to maintain, less bending over for those of us with achey backs.
- Aesthetic appeal! They are so fun!
- Less Soil erosion.

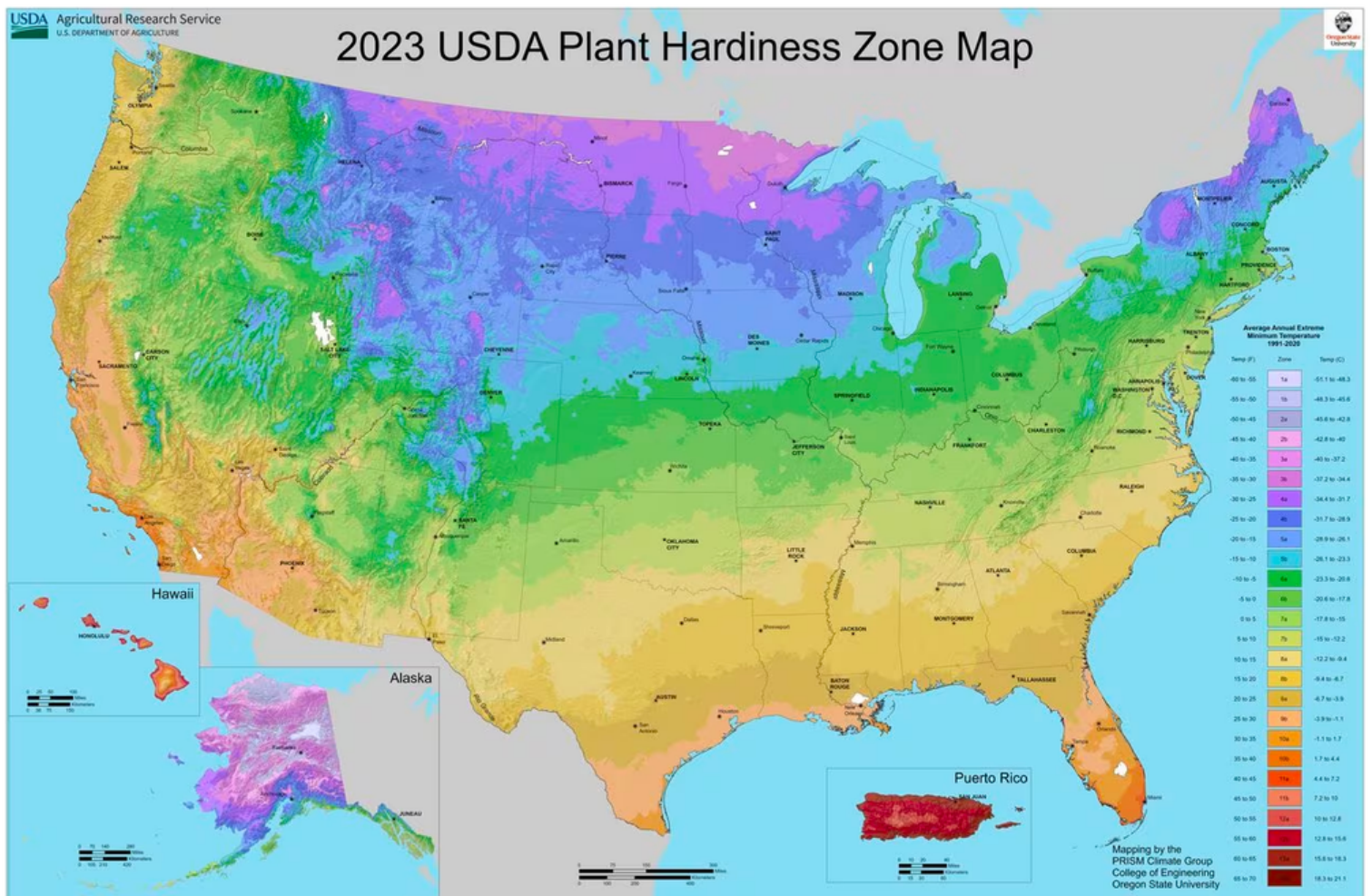
## Vertical Growing Plants:

- Climbing Cucumbers
- Pumpkins
- Squash
- Beans
- Snap Peas
- Indeterminate Tomatoes
- Sweet Pea Flower (not edible)
- Morning Glory
- Climbing Nasturtiums
- Clematis
- Honeysuckle



# KNOW YOUR ZONE

Knowing your zone will indicate when you can plant and what will survive in your area. Certain flowers can last year round in warmer climate like Zone 11 + 10. In colder zones your season is shorter and dictated by your first and last frost. The Farmers Almanac is a great source for this as well as the USDA website.



I'm zone 6a/5b - my last spring frost is typically around May 20th and my first fall frost is typically around Oct. 3rd Giving me right around 5 months. So I try to start a LOT of stuff early indoors to give them a time boost!

# CLIMATE + ELEVATION



Climate: the weather conditions prevailing in an area in general or over a long period. -Oxford Dictionary

-You'll want to think about your climate and your microclimate when gardening.

Microclimate is more in depth and much more pin pointed on your plot's location. For example I farm in the high desert at roughly 6600 ft. I'm in Colorado right off the deserts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah! We get a lot of wind on our farm. Cold night temps up until mid May, sometimes June. All of this is relative to my climate and microclimate.

-Microclimate is determined by wind, soil, temperature, moisture, latitude and elevation.

-Here's a great way to look at it: I farm 20 minutes north from another Flower Farm, Thistle Flower Farm, that I love! Now, their farm is 20 mins south of me. It is slightly lower in elevation, closer to the vast desert and a large mesa. Their farm often gets rain when mine does not.

Their farm tends to get hail, mine does not. Their farm also usually freezes a few days or a week before mine in the fall. Our guess is the desert impacting it as the night temps can dip more dramatically from day to night there. Further their soil differs from mine.

We both have clay, but mine is much more rocky than theirs. My garden is westward facing and does not have much shelter from the tricky west wind. Theirs is more southward facing with a bit more protection from trees and large structures. This makes a huge difference in our bloom times most seasons. Or often one crop succeeds their while fails in my garden and vise-versa and we are only twenty minute apart! Every little bit matters! The garden 1/4 mile down the road from you can be vastly different from yours.



# A SPECIAL NOTE ON OUR SOUTHWEST REGION

Often in the high desert region, closer to the sun, not a lot of rain, and temperature extremes. Here's a few notes:

- Devote a lot of water. Time for watering, etc. We can dry out fast in the spring and summer with no rain especially when wind picks up. (notes on watering pg. 36)
- We are higher in elevation. Sometimes when the sun is out it is stressing our plants. They might be wilting because the heat - not because they need water. If you are growing in a full sun spot, look into shade cloth for certain plants.
- Grow plants that are regional go-to's. Go to a local nursery and ask them what plants they sell that do best in desert situations if you are super dry.
- MULCH! MULCH! MULCH! This will help prevent soil erosion and help keep moisture in the ground.
- Our spring is fast. We don't typically have temperate 70 degree weather before it jumps to the high 80's. This might stunt plants. It often does in my garden. Compost tea will help this! Ask any hydroponics or nurseries near you for this!

A photograph of a field of flowers, likely zinnias, in the foreground. The background shows a sunset with a bright orange and yellow sky. A semi-transparent white rounded rectangle is overlaid in the center, containing the text "PICKING YOUR FLOWERS" in a white serif font. The flowers in the foreground are in various stages of bloom, with colors ranging from yellow to deep red. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

# PICKING YOUR FLOWERS



*easy peasy*



# COOL ANNUAL FLOWER LIST

These are the the easy cool flowers that you can plant out as soon as soil is workable in the spring, I have only chosen varieties here that also reseed well. These do best direct sown in fall or early spring once ground is workable. It is noted snapdragons do well started indoors.

- LARKSPUR
- QUEEN ANNES LACE/GREEN MIST
- CHOCOLATE LACE (DARA)
- BACHELOR BUTTON
- CLARY SAGE
- SNAPDRAGONS
- CALENDULA
- ORLAYA
- SWEET PEA
- NIGELLA
- FORGET ME NOTS
- CHAMOMILE



Note: Some of these require a bit more water in dry areas, but some like bachelor buttons are pretty drought tolerant

Some snapdragons & scabiosa will even survive through the winter, depending on the severity of winter.

Once all of these plants are established they are pretty low maintenance.



# STARTING COOL ANNUALS

Planting your cool annual flowers can feel a little weird because they need a cold period for establishment. Here's a quick guide to refer to when planting them!

Flower	Sow	Late winter/ Early Spring Planting
Orlaya	Direct Sow 6-8 Weeks Before first frost	Direct Sow as soon as ground is workable
Sweet Pea	Direct Sow 6-8 Weeks Before first frost	Direct Sow as soon as ground is workable

-Basically what we are doing here is taking the seed packet info and applying it in the fall against the first fall frost deadline instead of the spring first fall frost.

-In the spring these seeds are all so hardy and prefer some cold to germinate so I plant them immediately when the ground thaws and let them come up when they are ready!

-BONUS - A lot of these reseed well each year if you let them go to seed!



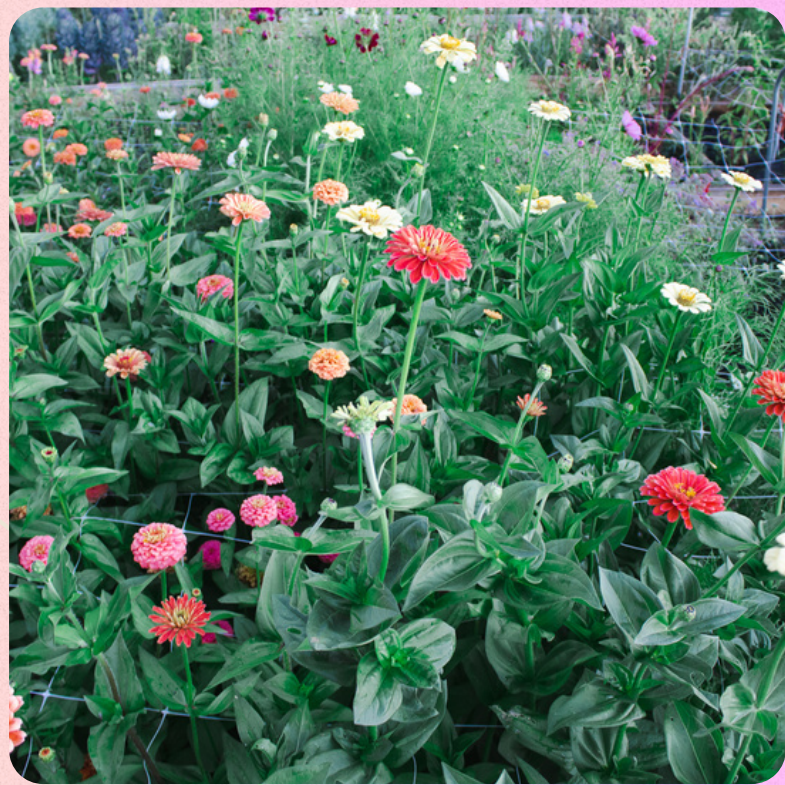
# TENDER ANNUALS



These bad boys produce like crazy - but they do need to be started indoors. They take a little more time but are worth it.

These will need to be hardened off and transplanted after the last spring frost.

Some like dahlias require a bit more labor, and in any dry climate, a bit more water as well.





# RE-SEEDING TENDER ANNUALS

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These are the lesser hassle annuals that reseed well!  
Some flowers like snaps can be planted as both cool and tender.  
These are great for cottage gardens!

- Cosmos
- Marigold
- Snapdragons
- Sunflowers
- Dill
- Amaranth

# TENDER ANNUALS

These are low maintenance but do not re-seed well.

- Zinnia
- Celosia
- Statice
- Dahlias
- Strawflower
- Garden Phlox
- Gypso
- Basil
- Nasturtium



# STARTING TENDER ANNUALS

As opposed to their cold annual friends, tender annuals should be started indoors to give them PLENTY of time to germinate and start so you can get them sooner and enjoy them longer!

Flower	Sow	Transplant
Zinnia	Start indoors 4-6 weeks before last frost	Harden off for a few days then transplant after last spring frost.
Celosia	Start indoors 6-8 weeks before last frost	Harden off for a few days then transplant after last spring frost.

As a rule of thumb, the directions on their seed packets can be followed pretty closely. I have found that oftentimes planting them outdoors a few days before last frost is pretty worth it. A lot of them catch up to transplanted annuals because they do not go through any transplant shock. So this part is up to you!

If you have less growing space like me, I encourage you to try direct sowing these a few days before last frost.





# PERENNIALS

These are the drought tolerant easy, stress free perennials.

Still watch for watering needs as every soil spot is different as well as sun and lighting.

Most of these like to do their own thing, typically and get stronger year by year.

Examples:

- Lavender
- Roses
- Sage

I recommend getting these from a local nursery! Starting these can be a bit tricky. Nurseries can help you pick the right ones for your area and your soil.





# PERENNIALS

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These are design focal points. Whether in the garden or in other landscaped areas of your yard and around your home.

These are truly invaluable investments.

## PERENNIAL LIST

- HOLLYHOCKS
- YARROW
- ROSES
- LAVENDER
- SAGE
- LILACS
- RUDBECKIA
- ECHINACEA
- COLUMBINES
- FOXGLOVE
- FLAX
- HYDRANGEA
- DELPHINIUM
- COREOPSIS
- PEONIES
- BLACK EYED SUSAN
- DAISIES
- FEVERFREW
- SALVIA
- BLANKET FLOWER
- TULIPS
- NARCISSUS
- IRIS
- HYACINTH



# VEGETABLES

## The good stuff!

Vegetables can offer an extra source of food to your table. They are often addicting to grow because their taste is so much better than in store produce. You've been warned.

### The best beginner annual vegetables:

- Green Beans
- Snap Peas
- Cabbage
- Lettuce
- Zucchini
- Tomatoes
- Chard
- Beets
- Radishes
- Carrots
- Cucumbers
- Squash
- Pumpkins



No, seriously, my kids  
plant these  
and we water and that's  
about it  
and these babies just grow  
and do their thing!  
Great veggies for beginners  
and busy  
people alike!

Note: Some of these  
beginner veggies will  
also help break up soil in  
new garden spaces.  
Especially root veggies  
like radishes, beets &  
carrots!



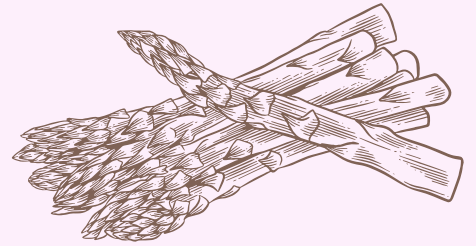


# VEGETABLES CONT.

\*Fun fact! A lot of unsuspected veggies can trellis! Like Pumpkins! Climbing cucumbers, loofahs, zucchini's, squash + gourds! \*

## Cold Hardy Perennial Vegetables:

- Horse Radish
- Rhubarb
- Asparagus
- Chives
- Ramps (onion, leek, garlic) (often grown as annuals for higher production.)
- Sorrel
- Berries (blueberries, strawberries, raspberries)



## Tricky Veggies To Grow:

(either for conditions needed or hard to start from seed)

- Corn
- Cabbage
- Celery
- Melons
- Artichoke
- Sweet Potatoes

## A Few Veggie Garden Tips:

- Start Peppers extremely early. Like February. No joke. They take a long time to grow.
- Don't start your other veggie seeds too early. They leap and bound and don't do well if they get leggy. Follow their sowing date directions.
- Plant with flowers intermingled to get good pollination and attract beneficial insects.
- Research companion planting! This will do wonders!

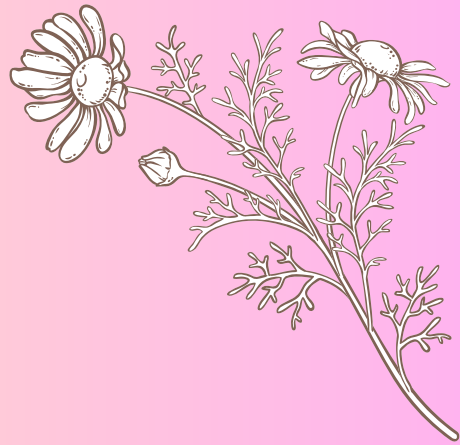
# HERBS

Herbs serve a medicinal or mechanical function.

For example Yarrow used to be used on battlefields to help coagulate bleeding! Yarrow has what seems to be an endless list of uses and it is quite possibly my favorite herb.

## List of fail proof common herbs:

- Rosemary
- Thyme
- Lemon-Thyme
- Mint
- Chamomile
- Yarrow
- Echinacea
- Oregano
- Dill
- Chives
- Fennel
- Lavender
- Calendula
- Wild Rose
- Basil
- Sage
- Bay Leaf



Often times herbs will perennialize, but not all. Such as calendula, basil, dill, chamomile, and often fennel. BUT herbs are tough and they WANT to be here and they reseed pretty darn well with the exception of basil in cooler climate.

\*Herbs are oftentimes incorporated into vegetable gardens for spices and to deter pests. Herbs are also a must have in cottage gardens!





# HERBS CONT.

Herbs are often used for the following around the home:

- Culinary Practices
- Soaps
- Tinctures
- Aromatherapy
- Lotions
- Oils
- Cleaning supplies
- Teas
- Apothecary Supplies

-Most herbs are pretty straight forward to grow and most pests don't like them.. Plant these intermittently throughout your garden to help control garden pests and add health and vigor to your garden and your body/home!

-Be careful however, some herbs LOVE to take over, such as mint. Plant mint separately and in a place it can spread it's legs without encroaching on any other plants! Roses can sometimes take over as well.

-Chamomile will appear to take over but it's roots aren't as deep. Same with dill. If these plants spread like wildflower through your garden, which they do, just scrape them with a hoe or shovel while they are still small seedlings. Overtime you will get a keen eye for them.







GET YOUR  
HANDS DIRTY!





# NO-TILL METHOD

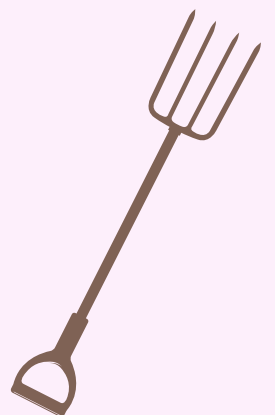
-Simply put, no tilling means just that. It involves the methodology of not disturbing the first 6"-10" of soil. This saves the micro-diversity living within the soil.

-This method over time increases soil bio-diversity and activity attracting the right microbes into your soil. It also helps weed mitigation over time too.

-THE BIGGEST RULE: plant a wide variety of plants! This natural diversity you see above ground in the garden creates amazing bio-diversity in the soil. Basically the more of a mix in the garden, the happier the soil!

-What's cool about this : the roots of your plants do all the work. They help aerate the soil and attract all the good little microbes, etc. to your garden! Over time this will start to eliminate pests. Think of it this way - you are cultivating a small assisted eco-system in your own yard!

NOTE: when starting in a bare spot you might have to till, especially if the soil is dead. (meaning weeds don't even really grow there.) This is okay and sometimes necessary. But doing it over and over to our soil releases the carbon and all the nutrients and micro-organisms within.





# SO NOW WHAT?

Now you apply the method. It's a little more initial labor but a great long term investment. Whether you have to start your garden by tilling, (you can rent a tiller from a local hardware or tractor rental place), or with a broad-fork, your main goal is to get your soil healthy and ready for plants!

-The best no mess up way of doing this is by adding organic matter into your soil. Compost. SO MANY KINDS. If you're unsure where to start, just get a neutral compost from your local nursery. They can help you find their neutral offerings. Soil tests can get a little intense for beginners. This will suffice fine for now.

PERSONAL TIP : Know someone with goats?? Go get that goat manure. It is the most hassle free compost I have worked with and it does not need to mature like other manures. It won't burn plants when used right away. Go offer to clean up poop if you want some free compost to add right away!

-Once you start adding compost, de-weeding your garden space, have a fence (or maybe a clever scarecrow of sorts), draw a layout! How do you want it to look!? What are your goals?? Think on it. You want line flowers (hollyhocks in back,) for example, roses by your seating area?

KEEP IN MIND: each plant has specific needs. Certain hours in sun, water, drainage. Etc. Take your time planning this out. Read each plants need.



# LAYERS

With no till - we layer! Now of course, you can use whatever method of gardening you like. These are guidelines and gardening is a big experiment!

I layer. Meaning each season I gently loosen the soil where it is needed, mostly where the annuals or veggies are planted. Then I layer organic matter on top. From molded leaves, compost, wood chips, and more. Any additives, such as lime will be raked in/on top after broad-forking.

-Cardboard. If I have a particularly weedy or problem area I'll put cardboard down with wood chips or top soil on top to suppress weeds or start a new garden area.

-I layer wood chips in between paths and in areas I do not have beds planted. Bio-degradable and over time suppresses weeds and improves soil.

Do this seasonally and the magic will start to unfold.





# COMPOST

START YOUR COMPOST SOONER RATHER THAN LATER!  
YOU'LL THANK YOURSELF LATER!

Don't overthink this! Mother Nature has been doing this literally forever without any fancy additives or tests. There are a few rules when it comes to compost but I'll keep it simple!



## COMPOST RULES:

1-Do put green and brown matter in your compost. Browns are things such as leaves, cardboard, straw, paper, wood chips, etc. Greens are things such as waste fruits/veggies, egg shells, coffee grounds, bones, fresh grass cuttings, manure etc.

2- Do turn weekly if you can! Sometimes I do it monthly. It just depends on how busy you get. Either way it will still be there decomposing.

3- Keep it moist. The decomposing matter needs the moisture. And the organisms from worms to microbes will thank you.

4- Keep the mixture of greens/browns at 50/50.

5-Do not put oils, or dairies in your compost. Some farmers do. I personally do not recommend it for bad bacterial reasons.

6- Some people add meat, dead animals, bones. I'm not opposed to this - however if you don't want that smell, or to attract more animal attention to your compost, leave it out. I constantly have to keep my dog out of the compost.

# SOIL BASICS

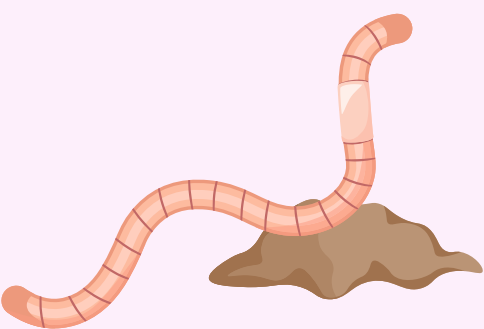
LOVE YOUR SOIL. IT IS ALIVE. IT WILL NOURISH YOU  
IF YOU NOURISH IT.

Soil consists of these 4 main things:

- Minerals (45-50%)
- Air (20-30%)
- Water (20-30%)
- Organic Matter (5-10%)

There are so many micro-organisms living in your soil you would not believe it. Truly! A spoonful of healthy soil can contain more living organisms in it than people on the planet! WHOA! Super cool!

It's important to give back to your soil and not just take away. Those little guys and big guys (like earth worms) need food! The best way to do that is to put organic matter back into (really onto) the soil each season!



\*By layering all our amendments on top of the soil, we don't disturb what is underneath plus the worms will visit nightly with other insects + organisms to naturally aerate the soil and blend all the amendments naturally. The way nature has always done it.



# SOIL BASICS CONT.

Assess your soil! Is it clay? Is it sandy? Is it Silty? What does it need? I'll tell you right now - you can never go wrong by adding organic matter. All soils are a carbon sink. (Your garden is helping save the world, feel good now???) Add the dead and decaying matter into your soil to help it consume carbon so it can pump out nutrients for your plants!

If you have CLAY soil - add organic matter. This can take 3+ years to correct soil texture. Have patience. DO NOT add sand. You will get concrete. Wood chips, compost, manure, worm castings, leaf mold, dry grass clippings, etc. You want to add a hefty layer each season. Try not to put more than 50% nitrogen based matter into this layer as a basic rule of thumb.

If you have SANDY soil, you'll want to add the same. Sounds weird, but remember adding clay here will make it cement. EW. Another option here would be to look into top soil. There are bulk options for this or small cubic foot options too. This is an already nutrient dense soil with a good mixture of organic matter. This is maybe the only time I recommend top soil.

If you have SILTY soil - you're the closest to a great soil. Lucky you. However your soil won't hold onto nutrients as good and your soil won't drain as well either. Here's where you are safe to add a bit of sand, but same rule applies - add organic matter. You can probably add a little extra here because it will go faster until your soil is better.

**RULE OF THUMB : Patience.**

**Building your soil takes years. We're  
all in this together!**

# SOIL BASICS CONT.

## N-P-K

You know those letters with the #'s on all the garden bags? Now you'll know!

Nitrogen (N): a huge contributor to plant growth + photosynthesis. If your plant's leaves are yellowing, low nitrogen may be a factor. Plants need a steady supply and nitrogen is depleted from it's source, say cow manure for example, within 8-12 months. It travels a lot through the soil food web. This is why we add new fertilizers. You just don't want the nitrogen to be too high. For example, at nurseries when you see a fertilizer bag, it's good to pick bags with the 'N' at 10 or lower.

Phosphorus (P): is also crucial to photosynthesis but more below ground. Phosphorus is important for plant root systems, plant structure and formation of flowers, fruits and seeds. If your plants have purple/blueish tints on leaves or new growth areas this is a good indication of low Phosphorus. Bonemeal is a great phosphorus additive to soil. But adding organic matter into clay soils will allow the microbiome in the soil to create phosphorus naturally.

Potassium: This macronutrient is for the entirety of the plant. Potassium is what helps your plant's leaves take in carbon dioxide. It helps regulate the plants enzymes for growth, and water regulation. Potassium can be a bit harder to add in the garden and can be overdone quickly. Most soils out west are typically okay in terms of levels of Potassium as opposed to the East Coast. If your soil does need K, a great way is wood ash, or greensand but look up their application rates!





There's a little poem for N-P-K  
to help you remember their function  
for plant health:

**Up. Down. + All Around!**

N- upward foliar and new growth.

P - Root intake and health for new growth.

K - All around health, flower and fruiting production.



# SOIL BASICS CONT.

Remember the no till method??  
We're bringing it all together now.

We layer on our organic matter, add our mulches, and try not to disturb the soil by tilling. Each time we till we are causing catastrophic damage to the soil biome underneath. I haven't even scratched the surface on the organisms and life teething below. This is a beginner guide after all!

## Soil Rules:

- 1 - Add organic matter every year.
- 2 - Don't till if you don't have to.
- 3 - Do a soil PH test. Research and see what you need to add.
- 4 - Mulch!
- 5 - Have designated garden paths (so you don't compact good growing soil)
- 6 - Add various types of dead matter. A buffet of options for the organisms in your soil.
- 7 - Plant a wide variety of plants. Their roots speak to the soil biome and draw in the good stuff.
- 8 - Don't add too much of one N-P-K (your soil needs Balance)
- 9 - Fertilize with organic fertilizers with dead stuff. Like Fish emulsion to keep feeding organisms.
- 10 - Keep your soil covered! Barrier fabrics, mulches etc. This keeps soil from erosion.



# SOIL PH

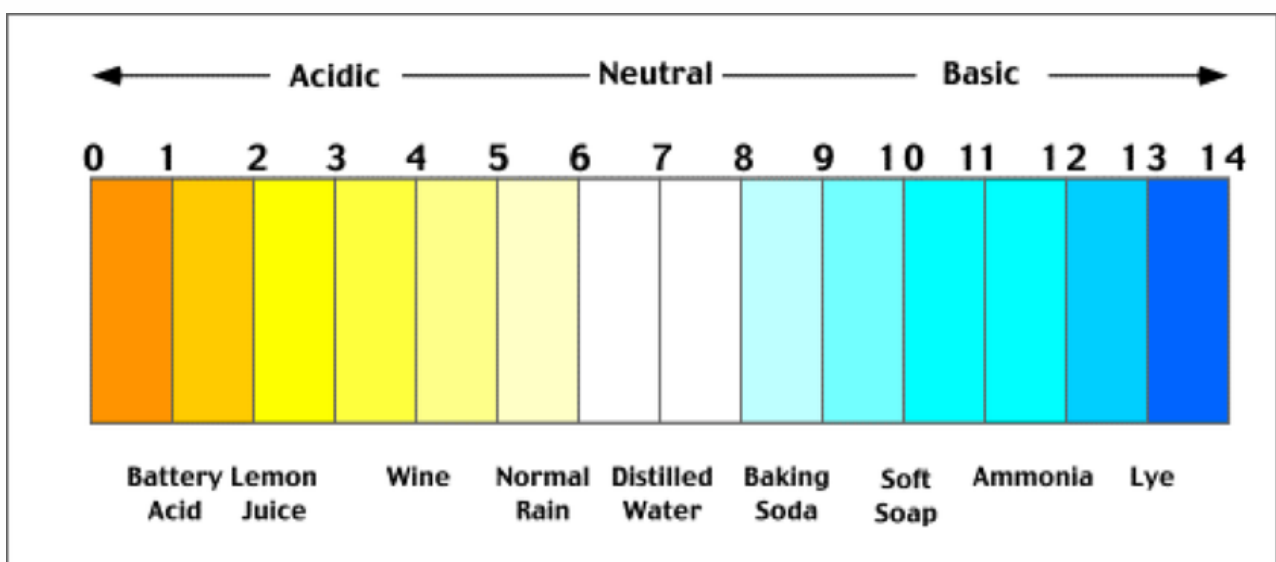
When growing (especially starting) a garden you'll want to do a basic soil PH test. You can get these on amazon, at your local nursery, or specialty garden centers. Don't let them scare you.

The lower the PH, the more acidic your soil. The higher the PH the more alkaline. Neutral is a beautiful place to be. To have a more neutral PH you want a variety of soil biome (lots of critters in your soil). The best way to do this - add dead organic matter and plant, plant, plant!

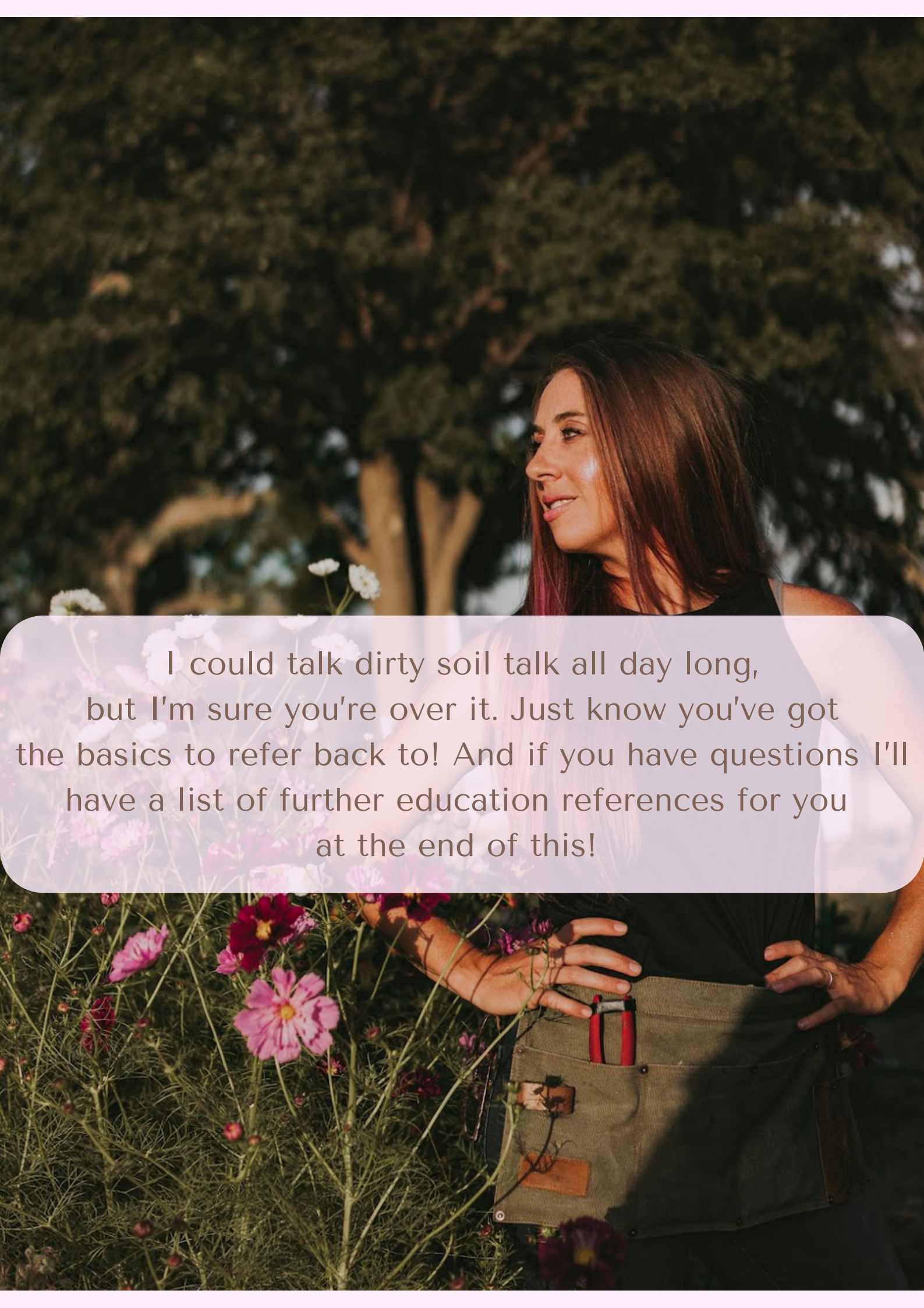
Plants do a lot of the work with their roots. The more you plant the better your soil. The more organic matter, the more for your soil biome to eat. This all contributes to a good PH.

NOTE: fertilizer and organic matter is not always the same! Sometimes fertilizers like manure that are heavy in nitrogen can increase acidity. Ideal dead matter such as worm castings or leaf mold that are already PH neutral are ideal to add! Or a good home compost as talked about previously.

\*Most plants in the garden love to grow in a neutral soil PH. I won't get too fancy here. Just know a 6-8 PH range in your soil is an ideal place to be at a basic level.



Credit : University of Conneticut



I could talk dirty soil talk all day long,  
but I'm sure you're over it. Just know you've got  
the basics to refer back to! And if you have questions I'll  
have a list of further education references for you  
at the end of this!



# FERTILIZER FEEDINGS

Nope - not soil amendment! These are little boosts for you plants, happy or sad, to make them feel extra special!



\*I try to fertilize weekly or bi-weekly once plants are established. Especially my flowers. It helps them with bloom production and also controlling certain pests/diseases.

Fertilizing with organic all around options such as

- Compost Tea
- Fish Emulsion
- Liquid Worm Castings
- Liquid Seaweed

I usually do a foliar spray feeding that the plants take in, early in the morning or later in the evening when the sun is not going to burn the plants when the application is sprayed.

This gives them a boost while also deterring pests who don't appreciate the smell or taste of these fertilizers.



# WATERING



Watering sometimes consumes my life. In the heat of summer I might water the entire garden twice a day or have the drip tape running all day! Why? Because my micro-climate AND I have large 4x30 raised beds with hundreds of water sucking plants in them.

Also I live in the Southwest High Desert of Colorado, closer to the sun at nearly 6600 ft in elevation, no humidity, and wind. Plus - there are times our micro-farm does not get rain for 16-22 week periods. No joke. Irrigation is our life line. Sometimes I question why I garden/live here! But it is truly a unique place and I never want to leave!

In other regions of the country/world people might get regular rains on their farm/garden and won't need to water as much as someone like me does. A lot of flower farming guides come from the Pacific Northwest or East Coast for some reason... where they all get more regular rains and a bit more temperate climates. This might not be true for some of us reading growing info produced from such vastly different climate zones.

So pay attention to your climate/microclimate for watering. Ask neighbors and seasoned gardeners about how much they water in your area. This will be the best watering reference to go off of.





# WATERING CONT.

This is a big one.

I'm sure you're aware plants need water.  
But how much? How often? And how?

## Will you be watering by tap or irrigation?

Tap water can add up, but it is doable.

Here on the farm we have irrigation and water with drip tape. It's magical. Drip tape waters down at ground surface with a slow drip. It helps keep the soil from water compaction. With tap water you can also use drip tape.

Another method for watering we use here on the farm is a "Wobbler". They are amazing wobbly sprinklers. Easy to clean, easy to use. They do overhead water which some people are against for flowers/certain veggies. In my personal experience I've done both and both seem the same. The overhead watering has never damaged my flowers here in the dry Southwest. However, try it out and see.

You can always hand water with a hose as well depending on your garden size/production.

## How Much To Water/How Often:

In containers or raised beds you will need to water more frequently or more deeply. As mentioned on the previous page, for other reasons too.

A great way to gauge your plant's watering needs is with a soil sleuth's and probes, which show you in a tube or notch like gatharer what soil is wet and how far down it is wet. There are also soil moisture meters that can vary in accuracy. So do your research on those and check your garden daily for moisture content.



# WEEDING

Let me preface by saying this. If you ever feel unloved go to your garden and look at your weeds. Weeds are forever. They love you so much so, that they have made an eternal vow to never leave you. And they mean it!

## My advice on weeding:

- Don't use sprays unless it is a deadly/harmful weed to animals, children, yourself. There are a few bad weeds out there that are regulated heavily. Your local government should have a list of these in your area.
- I hate to say it, but weeding by hand in a garden space is the best method. Especially when weeds are young and do not have mature seed heads.
- I will occasionally go out with a weed burner and burn a lot of new growth seedlings. If you're able to do this you will thoroughly enjoy. Just don't get carried away like me and accidentally burn your favorite rose bush! Oops!
- Sometimes simpler is better. My favorite weeding tool is often a butter knife or a good old fashioned hand held steel weeder and my hands. Get the roots up. It feels good.
- DO NOT put your weeds in the compost. It's risky. Last thing you want is a weed infestation growing in there because a few hard to see seeds.
- DO it in small increments. 30 mins one eve. Maybe 15 mins tomorrow. Or pay some teenagers a little bit of money so you don't have to! That's my favorite!



# PESTS

Don't like bugs? Most gardeners don't.  
But they will become a constant companion.  
I'm okay with most bugs. I feel bad killing them.  
Yup. I'm that person. Even "pests" in the garden.

-I'll keep this short because boy - pests are a learn as they come sort of problem. Along with diseases. Each climate has it's on set of each.

To minimize pests here are a few tips:

-Plant a wide variety of plants. This will allow housing for their natural predators. For example, ladybugs love my yarrow and will stay there all summer long while visiting my dill that has aphids. Lucky ladybugs love aphids.

-CROP ROTATION - move your crops around year to year. Try not to ever plant in the same bed twice. Pests lay their eggs where the food is. If you move the food, the pests starve. See what clever gardeners did there????

-Cover super tempting crops if needed, such as the brassica family (kale, broccoli, cabbage, etc.) that a lot of bugs love to munch on.

-If you absolutely need help because a pest is overwhelming do your research on the least invasive technique. For example some people resort straight to diatomaceous earth because it is natural and organic - but it also sadly, kills good insects too. Research unique solutions for each pest.

-Cultivate a garden for bugs and wildlife alike. Get a birdbath or two. They help keep bugs under control too! Every thing from worm, to mouse, to wasp, to bird is working in an eco-systematic way to create balance in the garden. This too takes time but can be done!

-Cover your soil! Weeding regularly and fertilizing regularly all contribute to lower pests as well. Eggs that can't burrow in the soil die, weeds that house a bunch of insect that aren't there? Bonus! Fertilize so the plants are less attractive/tasty to certain insects? Win!

-Check your garden daily. Look under leaves, around the stalk, etc. Kill bugs if you can. In summer when the dahlias are close to blooming for example, the grasshoppers come out. Managing them is next to impossible. Foliar fertilizers only keep them at bay for a few days. Same with organic insect soaps. Other than that there are a few chemical options I have not tried... so what do I do? THE NASTIEST job on the farm. I take scissors and cut their heads off. I hate it. It's disgusting. But I LOVE my dahlias and will do anything for them.



# STARTING SEEDS

To start your seeds look at each individual seed's germination directions. These will be provided by the seed packet or farmer from which the seed came. Follow that seed's specific direction. Some require light to germinate while others do not. Also seeds require moisture, for germination. So keep an eye on your seedling trays.

We use a method called soil blocking to reduce waste. Our soil blocks have no cell tray containing the dirt. It's just tightly compacted dirt. We sow our seeds in these small blocks and watch the seedling size closely once it has established itself with deeper roots.

You can acquire seed trays and seed starting mix from Walmart to your local Nursery, Amazon, etc. When picking a soil for your seedlings, a "seedling mixture" is best. I do not recommend pure coconut coir mix or those weird expandable pods. Choose a good ol' seedling mix. They have a very neutral, low nutrient soil mix typically so as not to burn your seedling's new roots. Also - seeds are incredible and come equipped with everything they need to get started in this life. Don't fret!

Once your seedlings bloom, whether indoor or outdoor, keep a close eye on them. If they were started indoors keep track of the dates you planted them so you know when to up pot them into something larger or transplant them outdoors (after hardening them off). I have attached seed starting charts for you in the coming pages to help you out!



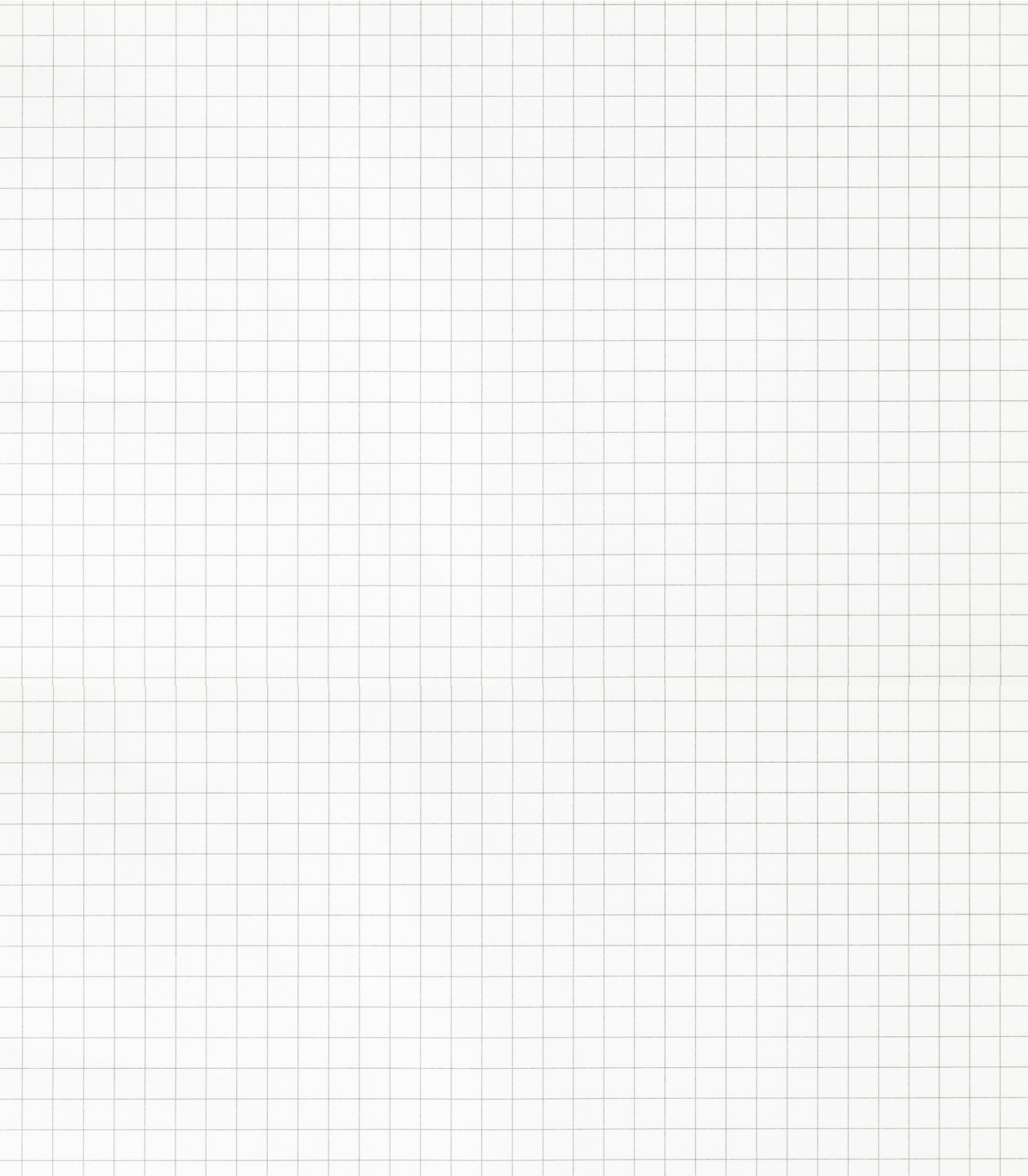
# GARDEN GOALS

Take time to reflect : what do you want from your garden? What plants will help you achieve this?

[illegible]

# GARDEN LAYOUT

Draw out a space, where you want each plant, etc. It doesn't have to be pretty or perfect. Just something to guide you.





# INDOOR SEED STARTING RECORD

[illegible]

# OUTDOOR SEED SARTING RECORD

[illegible]



# GARDEN SOIL NOTES

When testing your soil is a good idea to test multiple areas of your garden/yard.

Soil Test Area	PH #	Clay, Sand or Silt	Needed Amendments

Additional Soil Notes:

# ENJOY YOUR GARDEN

Literally reap what you have sown. In the best way.





# A GARDENER'S GREATEST JOY



Once the garden starts to transform and bloom and provide you with harvests, it's the best feeling. One of wonder and awe and "Did I really grow this??" Take time to enjoy it. Take photos, take notes in a journal. What has worked really well this season? What hasn't?

Have a place in your garden to sit and watch the sunrise or sunset! Bistro sets are popular in gardens for a reason!

I occasionally host garden gatherings so others can come enjoy the beauty and take flowers home. Take photos in the garden with your family! The season ALWAYS flies by faster than we wish and looking back on garden photos is a treasure. It's also amazing as the seasons pass and you look back on old photos and see how much your garden has transformed!

Speaking of harvesting though - each flower, herb and veggie requires different harvesting techniques. Make sure you follow up on how to harvest everything correctly! I'll have a cut flower harvest and care guide available on my website. Otherwise we are in the days of the internet! Youtube or Google will help you if you need a quick reference!





# WHAT I WOULD INVEST IN FOR MY FIRST SEASON

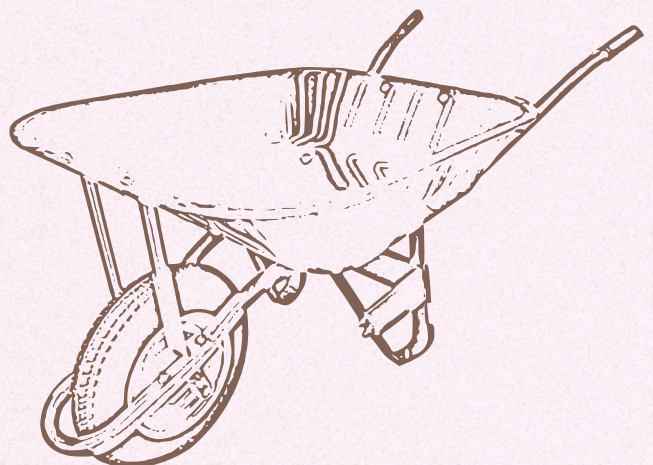
These tools might be an initial  
investment, but they are so beyond  
worth the money.







- BROAD FORK (FOR NO TILL)
- NICE SHOVEL
- WEED BARRIER FABRIC  
(JOHNNY'S SELECT SEED OR AMAZON)
- BAILING TWINE
- LOTS OF HEAVY CLIPPERS
- LOPPERS
- IRRIGATION DRIP TAPE (DRIP DEPOT OR IRRIGATION KING))  
OR
- WATERING WOBBLERS (IFA)
- BUCKETS (ASK CITY MARKET)
- SOIL TESTER
- JOURNAL (TAKE ALL THE NOTES YOU CAN)
- FENCING TO KEEP CRITTERS OUT
- WHEELBARROW OR GARDEN CART (TRUST ME)
- GOOD BOOTS AND SHOES
- A METAL HEAD RAKE
- BASKETS
- SEED STORAGE CONTAINER
- GARDEN MARKER (SHARPIES DON'T COUNT)
- GARDEN MASKING TAPE
- GARDEN TAGS
- GARDEN STAKES/T-POSTS
- GOOD GLOVES







WHEW! You made it to the end!

It might feel a bit overwhelming, but if I could have you walk away from this guide with JUST ONE thing it would be this: just garden. Start. That's it. Don't overthink or overcomplicate!

Our ancestors have been gardening for thousands of years before us with little to no references. They didn't have fancy soil tests and gages. They just started digging and experimenting. They observed nature and worked alongside it. Agriculture has a long history with a lot of failures along the way. You got this!

I hope your garden becomes as beautiful as you have dreamt it to be! Cheers,

*-celest*





# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [ladysouthwest.com/blog](http://ladysouthwest.com/blog) - I'll be posting many more garden tips here!
- The Impatient Gardener : [youtube.com/c/TheImpatientGardener](https://youtube.com/c/TheImpatientGardener)
- Floret Farms : "A Cut Flower Garden" book by Erin Benzakein
- "Grow Your Soil" by Diane Meissler
- "The Ecological Gardener" - Matt Rees-Warren
- "Connies Dahlias : A Beginner Guide" - Connie Thompson
- "The Complete Gardener's Guide" - DK Publishing
- Free 6 hour agriculture course from Oregon State University.

A scenic landscape photograph featuring a mountain range in the background under a dramatic, colorful sunset sky. In the foreground, there is a field of flowers, including several large white dahlias. A semi-transparent, rounded rectangular text box is centered over the middle of the image.

THANK YOU!