

## **It's time for fall planting!**

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Before you plan that trip to the garden center, here are some important points you should be considering for your garden beds.

### **Soil Prep:**

Our heavy clay is not ideal for most plants that prefer well-draining soil. If you spend some time amending your soil with compost, your efforts will pay off in the long run. There are many types of compost. Whether you're buying mushroom compost in bags at a big box store, or buying compost in bulk from a soil yard, I have found that any well-aged compost will do for most garden beds. When you're preparing a new bed, lay out 3-4 inches of compost over the entire area. You can then lightly till it into a depth of about 6-8 inches. If working within an established bed, apply a layer of compost around each plant after planting.

### **Site Selection:**

Choosing the perfect location for your plants can be tricky. This is where being a student of your own garden is essential. Summer is the best time to track the sun, as it will show you which areas get the most intense heat during the day. Whether your yard is mostly sun, mostly shade, or somewhere in between, get to know these areas well so you can pick the best plant for that spot. If reading sun requirements on plant tags is confusing to you, here's an easy way to navigate those descriptions:

Full Sun – 6 to 8 hours or more of sun per day

Part Sun, Part Shade – 4 to 6 hours of sun per day

Full Shade – 4 hours of morning sun per day or less

### **Irrigation:**

Rarely does a plant like to be watered from overhead. With our high humidity in the summer that's a recipe for all types of problems. Consider installing a drip irrigation system. You'll reduce your overall water usage, it's typically exempt from water restrictions, and your plants will be getting water right where they need it most, at the base. Try to keep your drip lines a few inches away from the crown of each plant. The larger the root ball of the plant, the further

away you can stake down your lines. Since drip irrigation is not a foolproof method of watering, make sure to check your lines frequently to ensure that they are working properly, and that you're running them long enough to deeply soak the soil. Ideally, you'll be watering your garden beds less often but more deeply than with traditional overhead watering systems.

### **Mulch:**

When planting is done, you'll want to finish off your beds by adding a layer of hardwood mulch. Mulch is essential to keeping the roots of your plants cool in the summer, warm in the winter, and for helping to retain moisture around your plants. Since mulch prevents water from splashing from below, it can also help to prevent some soil borne diseases. Another added benefit to adding an organic mulch to your garden is that, as mulch breaks down, the decaying material actually helps to feed your soil making our heavy clay easy to work in and more fertile. Try to get at least a 4-inch layer of mulch covering your garden beds. Circle each plant in the shape of a donut, never letting the mulch touch the crown of the plant. Mulching too close to the plants crown can cause problems with decay, fungal growth and possibly pest infestation.

Now that the heat of summer has passed, we can all enjoy some new plants, and a wonderful day in the garden!

**Looking forward to more fall planting?** Don't miss the Rockwall County Master Gardeners Fall Plant Sale! Shop "In-Person" Saturday October 11<sup>th</sup> 9am to 4pm (or until sold out) at the Rockwall County Courthouse. Find a large selection of seasonal color and favorite winter annuals along with 1 and 3-gallon perennials, shrubs, drift roses, herbs and vegetable starts. Visit the Ask A Master Gardener Booth for guidance and growing instructions, plus bulb and seed pre-order pick up. Bring your carts and wagons for all the amazing fall plant finds! Go to [txmg.org/rockwall](http://txmg.org/rockwall) for more details.