CONTACT Ernie Edmundson

361 790-0103

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**THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF GARDENING**

**By Dr. Jeanna Godfrey**

**Aransas/San Patricio Master Gardener**

Every gardener makes mistakes.  Often, we learn more from our mistakes than our successes.  However, no one wants to make the same mistake repeatedly.   Here are seven gardening “sins” and tips on how to avoid them:

1. Not being honest with yourself about how much time, money, and energy you can give your garden.     Even the simplest garden will require some maintenance to look its best throughout the year.  Weeding, watering, pruning, harvesting, staking, mulching, mowing, and other tasks are all part of the gardening experience.  Unless you can afford to pay a full time gardener (in which case you probably are not reading this anyway), it is important to be realistic about how many hours and what type of work you can physically do in the garden.
2. Not making a plan before buying plants.  Every gardener has made this mistake at least once or twice.  The thrill of seeing all those beautiful, healthy new plants at the nursery in early spring makes the gardener’s heart beat a little faster.  Resist the temptation!  Impulse buying can be costly and result in a mishmash of plants rather than a cohesive garden.  Take the time to assess your site.  Determine the light exposure, soil type, moisture levels, existing structures and plants already in place.  Then research the plants you like to see if you can provide the right environment for them.  Also consider color and garden theme (cottage, serenity, rose, tropical etc.) before making a final decision on what plants to buy and how many.
3. Not putting the right plant in the right place.   Knowing the horticultural needs and mature size of your new plant is vital to placing it appropriately in your garden.  Those petite plants in one gallon pots can become twenty foot monsters in a few short years.  If the plant loves acidity, you may have to do extensive amending to grow it successfully in our alkaline sandy soils.  Gardening in our climate can be challenging enough without creating problems unnecessarily.
4. Not watering effectively.  Too little or too much water stresses plants and may eventually kill them.  Group plants according to moisture needs; avoid watering during the heat of the day, and use drip irrigation whenever possible to maximize watering efficiency.
5. Not knowing your soil type and improving it as needed.  Sandy soil drains well but loses water and nutrients rapidly.  Clay soil retains water and nutrients but can be difficult to work, rapidly becoming waterlogged during periods of heavy rainfall.  Amending the soil regularly with organic matter such as compost or well-aged manure improves both sandy and clay soils.
6. Not having a maintenance schedule and sticking to it.  Regardless of how beautiful a garden appears when first planted, it is regular maintenance that keeps it looking its best.  If you avoided sin number one and were realistic about how much time, money, and energy you can devote to the garden, sin number six will be easy to avoid.  Mulching beds to reduce weeds and water use also helps regulate soil temperature, saving time and effort in the garden.  Walking through your garden on a regular basis provides enjoyment, but also allows problems to be identified and corrected before they get out of hand.
7. Not keeping a garden journal.  A garden journal can be as simple as a few notes jotted on a wall calendar documenting planting times, to books replete with pictures, pressed flowers, drawings, graphs, and lengthy discourses of gardening highs and lows.  Regardless, the notes you take provide valuable information for future use in the garden and just may prevent you from committing the seven deadly sins of gardening.

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Texas AgriLife Extension Service - Aransas County can be reached by phone at 361 790-0103 or by email at [aransas-tx@tamu.edu](https://webmail.indstate.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=200f42bb97404ed491f3e8d125ad65fc&URL=mailto%3aaransas-tx%40tamu.edu) and is located at 611 E. Mimosa, Rockport, TX.

Ernie Edmundson

Office Manager

Texas AgriLife Extension Service

Aransas County

361-790-0103

FAX 361-729-3937