

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

Tip of the Week

By: Ursula Nanna

“Before You Go There!”

If you just took a giant leap on your shovel and realize you hit more than dirt...WHOA! Before you go there, be sure you know more than just your property line because proper preparation prevents the unthinkable from happening.

Be sure to know where the cable lines are laid, the irrigation pipes are placed, and the electric/gas lines run. Did you know that the utilities will send out a crew – free, to mark these lines for you? Call 1-800-242-9113 for a dig test. It usually takes 3 or more days from the time of the call to see the crew.

Evaluate the new site noting the path of the sun and areas of shade from mature trees. Start asking the right questions of yourself. Is the site providing good drainage? Does the soil need amending? How will you know that? Test the soil by going to the local Ag-life Extension Office and get the bags for the samples. Follow the directions and send the bags to the address given. Soon you'll know exactly what supplements the garden site will require for good plant growth.

Next, evaluate the traffic patterns to see where paths may be needed, and decide if you'll use mulch, stone, bricks, or pebbles. Is there a nearby source of water and electricity to make life easier? Will the garden be expanded in the future? Are you planning on water conservation barrels, composting, or fencing? Do you have animals or children to consider? You must plan for the future desires of your family and incorporate those desires.

Now it's time to consider the garden beds' shape; perhaps square, rectangle, round, an island? Remember to keep the width of beds to 4' to make weeding easy from all sides.

I usually plant before I mulch because it's neater for me. Others will plant after mulching.

For mulching, NEVER use plastic as it stagnates the underneath soil putrefying it and robbing it of oxygen. Use weed-cloth; or better still, 8-12 pages thick of overlapping newspaper, and then mulch over that with pebbles, bark, native mulch, cedar chips, grass clippings, leaves, or whatever you prefer.

Every bit of prior knowledge and planning is worthwhile and will save you time, money, and trouble in the long run.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com