

Growing Lingo

By Sheri Bethard, Texas Certified Master Gardener, Orange County Master Gardeners

There are a lot of growing terms gardeners use these days and whether you are a beginner or a pro, there are always new terms to learn or refresh your knowledge on. So, this week I am going to share with you some of the more common gardening terms you might hear around the garden centers you visit the next time.

Annual – These plants bloom, goes to seed and dies all in one growing season. It has to regenerate itself annually, thus the name. (example Texas Bluebonnets)

Perennial – A plant that blooms, goes to seed and may or may not die back during the growing season. It will come back each year from its rootstock, such as a Hardy Hibiscus, Yarrow, Turks Cap.

Biennial – Is a plant which sprouts one year then doesn't flower until the next year and dies. (Sweet William, Delphinium)

Air Layering – A stem or shoot of a plant is wounded with a shallow cut or by removing a ring of bark to stimulate rooting, and a plastic sleeve full of moss or soil mix is taped around the stem. Roots form in 6 – 8 weeks or longer depending on the plant. Once a substantial number of roots have formed the stem can be cut from the donor plant.

Cuttings – are parts of plant stems that have been removed from a donor plant for use as propagative material. They produce roots that grow where they were cut if provided the right conditions. Cuttings take from 6 – 8 weeks or longer to form new roots.

Bolting – Is called going to seed. When plants, such as lettuce or other similar plants in hot weather, make flowers then form seeds for the next generation.

Deadheading – Is removing old flowers after they have completed their blooming time and before going to seed. This encourages new flowers to form.

Determinate – Used mostly when speaking of tomatoes. They have a predetermined size and stop growing at that point. (Homestead, Roma)

Indeterminate – Also used when speaking of tomatoes. The plant has a less definite mature size. It will continue to grow until something causes it to stop growing such as a freeze. (Better Boy, Cherokee Purple)

Hardening Off – This is when a gardener transitions tender seedlings from being grown indoors by slowly introducing them to the sun and wind.

Cotyledons – Pronounced "Kä da LEon" They are the first "leaves" the plant produces which are not actually leaves. They are produced from the germinating seed. Sometimes called "seed leaves"

True leaves –Are the first set of leaves that new plant produces that actually look like leaves of the plant.

Stolon/Runner – Horizontal stem that is fleshy or semi-woody and lies along the top of the ground. (Strawberry runners (daughters))

Rhizomes – Similar to stolons but grow underground. (Iris)

Soil – Consists of air, minerals, water and decaying remains of plants and animals allowing plants to grow.

Dirt – Does not hold any minerals or organic matter and plants struggle to grow initially or are unable survive.

Seeds – The process which plants survive for future generations. Some seeds need light in order to germinate while others need dark to germinate.

Sunlight Exposure for plants –

- Full Sun is a minimum of 6 hours of direct sunlight on most days
- Partial Shade or Partial Sun – is 3 to 6 hours of sun exposure each day preferably in cooler hours, early morning or evening
- Dappled Sun – is similar to partial shade but is sunlight that makes its way thru the branches and leaves of deciduous trees
- Full Shade – does not mean no sun at all. Very few plants can survive without sunlight. These plants can survive on less than 3 hours of direct sunlight each day with filtered sunlight during the rest of the day.

Short Day Plant – A plant that needs a long period of darkness in order to form flowers. Normally when the days are less than 12 hours of light. (Mums, Poinsettias, Christmas cactus)

Long Day Plant – These plants require a short rest period each day (darkness) to produce flowers. (Petunias, Potatoes when they form tubers)

Day Neutral Plant – These plants do not depend on the amount of darkness or daylight hours in order to flower. They respond to flowering based on their age/maturity. (Sunflowers, Tomatoes)

Pruning – Is done to train a plant, maintain plant health, improve the quality of flowers, fruit, foliage or stems and/or restrict growth. Prune broken limbs, weak limbs, suckers, water spouts (branches growing straight up) and interfering branches (those crossing others). Removing these branches will allow for air circulation thru out the plant or tree.

Up Potting – When the roots start growing out of the drain holes is the signal it is time to move to a larger pot. The next size pot should be about an inch larger in circumference.

Bio Char – It is a special kind of charcoal that may have many benefits as a soil amendment. It is supposed to hold water better, increase fertilizer efficiency, remove pollutants and pesticides, mitigate climate change, increase soil pH, increase soil microbe populations and increase cation exchange of soil. While doing all this it is also eco-friendly.

Leaf Mold – Simply put, leaf mold is fully decomposed leaves. Don't turn up your nose. Leaf mold has a rich, earthy scent and a dark, crumbly texture that could make regular compost jealous. It takes 1 to 2 years for the process to complete.

Compost – Is decayed organic matter from once living organisms and their by-products such as manure. It contains most if not all of the nutrients necessary for plant growth by improving the soil and helps hold in the nutrients reducing the need for additional fertilizers.