

## Four Rights of Every Plant

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The average homeowner often forgets that plants are living creatures, not an inanimate object like a stone or bench that is added to a garden without worry about success or failure. They have specific needs to survive properly. The key to success is knowing not only what to plant, but also where, how and when to plant it. *The Four "Rights" of Plants* are planting the right plant in the right place in the right way at the right time of year.

### THE RIGHT PLANT

All plants are not alike! Some plants species are much better adapted to surviving in the harsh environmental conditions of our area. Even within the plant species, there are some varieties that perform better than others. It is important to know what works for this area.

Here are some resources that might help you choose the right plant for this area:

- Local, full-Service Garden Center Staff (look for Texas Certified Nursery Professionals)
- Local Newspaper Columns
- Texas Cooperative Extension (programs, publications, local plant lists)
- "Best of Texas" published by Texas Landscape and Nursery Association (formerly Texas Association of Nurserymen)
- "Xeriscape-To-Go" published by the Corpus Christi Xeriscape Coalition
- "A Guide to Growing Healthy Trees In The Corpus Christi Area" (a.k.a. "The Tree Book") published by the Tree Awareness Council
- The Garden Book published by the Corpus Christi Area Council of Garden Clubs

Also look at established yards and gardens and note what plants seem to do well in conditions similar to yours. Most gardeners and homeowners take great pride in their landscapes and are more than willing to answer questions about their plants

### THE RIGHT PLACE

Too often people go to a garden center, see a pretty plant, buy it and take it home and place it in the first available spot. Many times these selections die because it was planted in the wrong place or in a spot with environmental conditions that do not match the growing requirements of the plant. It is actually better to look at an area where you wish to add plants and evaluate the environmental conditions, *then* go to the garden center and find the right plant for that particular place.

Environmental factors to consider include the following:

- Light requirements (full sun, partial shade, heavy shade)
- Exposure (north vs. south exposure will affect temperature as well as light conditions)
- Soil type (clay vs. sand; note the amount of compost or organic material is in the bed)
- Drainage (does water stand after a heavy rain in the area)
- Space (consider not only the height, but the width and depth of the space available)
- Surrounding Structures (note positions of doors, window, sidewalks, driveways, etc.; consider how plants will affect their function.)

## THE RIGHT WAY

There is more to planting than digging a hole and throwing a plant in it. Here are some tips to help you plant the right way:

- Water soil a few days *in advance* to make it more pliable when you go to dig
- Prepare the soil in the entire bed in advance for shrubs and flowers with *plenty* of compost
- Always consider the *mature size* of plants and space them accordingly (Over crowding can produce weak plants with more insect and disease problems. Books and local nursery professionals can help you know how large a plant will get.)
- Dig your hole twice the diameter of the pot, and the same depth
- Always plant at *the same soil level* as in the pot (Planting deeper will stunt plant growth and invite disease and insect problems at the base.)
- Pack soil somewhat firmly around the plant
- Water well immediately after planting
- Note that trees need to be planted in a hole twice the diameter and the same depth as the tree's root ball (backfill with the native soil that has been broken up into a loose mixture)

## THE RIGHT TIME

Know when to plant which shrubs, flowers and trees. A "container grown" plant has lived its entire life in a pot and can usually be planted almost anytime depending on the plant species. Container grown plants are generally your best bet when landscaping because the root ball has not been damaged by digging. Bare-root as well as balled-and-burlapped (B&B) trees are primarily available in the late winter and early spring and need to be planted immediately.

Here are some tips about when to plant specific plant types.

- Trees should be planted between late October and mid April (This allows for better root establishment during mild days and traditionally wetter condition for South Texas.)
- Tropicals like hibiscus and bougainvillea should be planted in the spring (This allows them to get well established before winter. Don't plant them after early October in our area.)
- Palms should be planted in the late spring or summer when they are actively growing.
- Grass should be sodded or seeded in mid to late spring whenever possible (We use warm-season grasses that grow vigorously from April-mid October. That is when they should be planted)
- Annuals typically are replaced three times each year (early fall, early spring, early summer) with different types of flowers depending on the weather (Look at what's readily available at garden center and as the Texas Certified Nursery Professional on duty if you are unsure of what to plant.)

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