

Choosing the Right Plants

Important Considerations for Long-term Success

WHICH WAY IS WHICH?

If you have a hard time remembering which way is north, here is a trick! Spend an evening watching the sun set on whichever side of the house you can see it from. Really make the connection between that side of the house and the setting sun. This will help you remember which direction is west; at least in your backyard. Knowing what side of your house a planting area is on is very important. Direction determines the light, temperature and weather that plants in that area will face. Selecting the correct plants for a given sight will reward you with a low-maintenance landscape that looks great!

HOW MUCH SPACE DO YOU HAVE?

Measure each side of your planting area. Then determine how many square feet you have to work with. Be sure to calculate in some breathing room for each plant. Plants that are crowded by other plants or structures will never be the beauties you envisioned when you planted them. If you are in love with a huge, slow-growing plant, consider planting it temporarily. You might get 20 years of enjoyment from a white pine before it outgrows your space.

WILL PLANTS BE VULNERABLE TO SALT DAMAGE?

Some plants can tolerate salt build up while others perish at the thought. Make sure that you select plants that are specifically tolerant of salt for these areas. Many plants that are perceived as tough have a low salt tolerance.

IS THERE CONCRETE OR ASPHALT CLOSE TO THE PLANTING AREA?

Concrete can alter the pH of surrounding soil. The alkaline conditions that it creates are hard on some plants. Pavement also affects the temperature of surrounding soils. Certain plants require either cool or warm soil temperatures. Others cannot tolerate extremely cold or hot roots. These plants would not work well next to asphalt or concrete.

HAVE YOU CONTACTED YOUR UTILITY COMPANIES?

Digging into uncharted territory can be fatal. With one phone call to Gopher State One, you can get all of your underground lines and pipes marked. Look for this company in your local phone book.



Kahnke Brothers Tree Farm

HWY 212 West and Boone Road– 1 mile west of Plato, MN

10603 Boone Road, Plato, MN 55370

PHONE: 320-238-2572 • FAX: 320-238-2574 • www.kahnkefarm.com

Open SATURDAYS ONLY: May 1st–November 1st: 8AM–3PM

HOW TALL ARE WINDOWS AND WALLS THAT YOU DO NOT WISH TO OBSTRUCT?

An actual measurement is very helpful when you are selecting plant material.

WILL A PLANTING POSE ANY STRUCTURAL RISK TO YOUR HOME?

Having large, mulched areas close to your foundation can result in water damage. Tree branches that scrape against the roof when its windy can eventually remove shingles. Be sure that your planting doesn't damage your home.

WILL A PLANTING LIMIT ACCESS TO YOUR HOME?

It is important that you have access to all portions of your house in the event that repairs or improvements need to be made. Remember that these processes might require the aid of professionals who might not be too concerned about your plants. Factor in some space close to your home for future situations.

ARE ALLERGIES A FACTOR?

If so, this will greatly influence your plant choices. Beauty is not worth misery. There are plenty of lovely plants that are sneeze free.

DO YOU HAVE KIDS OR PETS?

Certain plants are very poisonous. These plants may be wonderful in all other aspects, but if poisoning is a risk, they should not be used.

HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU WANT TO SPEND MAINTAINING YOUR GARDEN?

If you are looking for plants that will thrive with neglect, you most likely will not want to buy hybrid tea roses. Know what you're getting in to. Plants that require shearing to keep their shape will look very ragged if you don't have time to shear them.

IS YOUR SOIL GOOD, BAD, OR UGLY?

Spending \$15 on a soil test is probably the best investment you will ever make. Fixing potential problems before you plant is much easier on the plants and you! A professional test is the only sure way to know what lurks inside your soil. Your local extension office has soil test bags available with directions on how to take a good sample. The University of Minnesota has a lab dedicated to soil that will analyze your dirt.

IS YOUR SOIL POORLY DRAINED?

To determine this, dig a hole, 24 inches deep. Fill the hole with water and allow it to drain out into the surrounding soil. Refill the hole and check it again in 24 hours. If there is still water in the hole, you have poor drainage. Amend the soil or choose plants accordingly.

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WHAT ARE YOUR ALTERIOR OBJECTIVES?

Sure you want to make your yard look nice, but what else would you like to accomplish with your planting? Aim high: you can kill many birds with one stone. Would you like more privacy? Do butterflies and hummingbirds brighten your day? Are cut flowers your bag? Decide what is important to you so your nursery professional can help make your dreams come true.

CHOOSE A THEME OR SCHEME.

Know what colors you want to work with. You don't need to be an artist to have a preference. If certain color combinations appeal to you, they will appeal to others too. Combine materials at a fabric store or paint chips at a hardware store if you are uncertain about color. Then bring samples of those colors with you to the garden center. Pay attention to looks that you like in fashion and home decoration. What elements can you take from those styles and apply to your garden? Commit to a style. A cottage garden is different from a Zen garden which is different from a knot garden. Try to find examples of different garden styles on television or in magazines. Knowing what styles and colors appeal to you will help you narrow down your options when selecting plant material and garden art.

DO CITY ORDINANCES OR SAFETY CODES PROHIBIT CERTAIN PLANTS?

Some plants are seen as "messy" plants by cities and covenants. Planting these plants might not be tolerated where you live. It is a good idea to check with your city or housing development before installing anything. Consider, also, the personal risk incurred by planting a tree that drops slippery fruit next to your sidewalk. Be aware that many trees produce catkins, fruits, seeds, etc. that might be an issue in some settings.

THIS MAY SOUND LIKE A LOT TO THINK ABOUT!

I am aware that I have given you lots of things to consider. However, planning is the key to happiness in the horticultural world. Carefully chosen plants will perform well in their given locations with little maintenance. Most of the planning process consists of paying attention to detail. Once you are aware of potential problems and desired results, you will be able to narrow down your options. This is important, since there are virtually zillions of plants to choose from. Don't be intimidated. People like myself work at garden centers because we enjoy talking to people about plants. Have fun with your landscaping projects this year! Come see me, Connie Kratzke, at Kahnke Brothers Tree Farm with your gardening questions!



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