

Garden Column for the Salisbury Post
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The few days of warm weather have sparked spring fever in all of us. Many have the "need" to be outdoors, especially with the weather a week ago. Unfortunately, our weather is still unsettled and we may have to wait a few more weeks. It is an excellent time to research and plan future outdoor gardening activities. Advanced preparation is essential in becoming a successful gardener. Below are a few mistakes home gardeners make that can be avoided with proper planning.

****Many fail to measure properly.** Take time to correctly measure lawns and landscape beds so fertilizer, herbicides and other pesticides can be applied properly reducing costs and saving our environment.

****No soil sampling.** Soil sampling determines gives growers identifies the soils' nutritional properties maximizing proper fertilization and reducing waste. This is an under utilized service that will help correct soil fertility problems.

****Improper soil preparation-**Digging a hole and planting a shrub with no amendments may work with some soil types, but with our tight clay soils, its best to improve the drainage and texture with soil amendments. Incorporating amendments such as ground bark or compost adding PermaTil improves workability and pore space which promotes root expansion.

**** Planting cheap plants.** One hundred bulbs for \$2.00 is not a bargain. Fantastic buys on small plants or bulbs often disappoint home gardeners. High quality plants and seed can be expensive, but the extra cost is reflected later in the results. Good plants are not cheap.

****Over planting.** Many tend to over plant, impatient for the shrubs to mature. Jamming plants close together look good at first, but as shrubs mature, they become over crowded and unattractive. Over crowded shrubs are often removed after a few years.

**How big will this plant get? Most buy plants without knowledge of how fast they grow or the mature size. A dwarf burfordi holly actually stretches eight feet tall. Many think that dwarf means it will not get much larger than the size in the container. Consult with qualified growers or sales person to learn as much about the plant as you can before planting.

**Improper pruning. I probably get more questions on pruning in the spring than any other subject. Most inquires are concerned about trees that are too big. Horning back trees or shrubs create unnatural forms weakening plants predisposing them to insect and disease problems. Take time to learn growth habits before pruning.

**Poor irrigation techniques or no irrigation. Often, homeowners will spend thousands on a landscape and refuse to spend a few hundred more on an irrigation system to ensure its longevity. Trickle systems are inexpensive and easy to install. With our history of droughts, irrigation should be part of the original planting.

**Improper planting techniques. It doesn't matter how much time or money you spend preparing the soil if you don't plant the shrub or apply the seed correctly. Sick or diseased shrubs are often planted too deeply. In tight clay its better to set shrubs a little high in a plant bed than too deeply. Seeding lawns with double or triple the recommended rates to achieve the "golf course" look wastes seed and provide a suitable environment for future disease problems.

** Impatient. Planning is very important part of good landscape design. Landscape architects spend hours developing the perfect landscape. Take you time and ask questions about growth and maintenance. Your landscape is an open book to your personality and which often impacts the value of your home. Ask a real estate agent.

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