

Gardening Basics

FOR
DUMMIES®

**by Steven A. Frowine
with the Editors of
the National Gardening Association**



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

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About the Authors

Steven A. Frowine was a plant nut even as a child. Since then, his love and sometimes obsession for outdoor and indoor plants has continued to grow. He worked in various horticultural jobs before and during high school and college. Steve has a bachelor's and a master's degree in horticulture from Ohio State University and Cornell, respectively.

His first job after graduate school was to set up a professional gardeners' program at Pacific Tropical Botanical Garden (now the National Tropical Botanical Garden) on Kauai, Hawaii. He later held other professional horticultural positions at Cleveland Botanical Garden and Pittsburgh Civic Garden Center. At Missouri Botanical Garden, he served as chairman of indoor horticulture.

Steve served as an executive at top horticultural businesses including W. Atlee Burpee Company, White Flower Farm, and International Gardening Products. Steve is sought out as a lecturer and has delivered hundreds of talks throughout the country. His presentations are noted for his excellent photography, his knowledge of the subject, and his sense of humor. He has appeared on various national TV shows and writes extensively, authoring many articles for horticultural trade and consumer magazines.

He has served on the boards of various professional organizations, including the National Gardening Association, Garden Writers of America, and the American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta. Steve served on the Visiting Committee of Longwood Gardens for six years.

Steve enjoys all plants and has a particular fondness for orchids. He wrote *Orchids For Dummies* (Wiley Publishing) and *Fragrant Orchids* (Timber Press). He is also the author of *Miniature Orchids*, published by Timber Press in spring 2007.

Steve is now president of his own horticultural consulting firm, where he works with various companies in the green industry on writing, photography, marketing, and public relations issues.

The National Gardening Association (NGA), founded in 1972, is a national not-for-profit leader in plant-based education, esteemed for its award-winning Web sites and newsletters, grants and curriculum for youth gardens, and research for the lawn-and-garden industry. NGA's mission is to advance the personal, community, and educational benefits of gardening by supporting gardeners, communities, and teachers with information and resources. For more information, please visit www.garden.org.

Dedication

This book is for all new and veteran gardeners who have discovered or are about to realize the lifelong wonders and pleasures of gardening and the plant world. Please remember that gardening is not primarily about an end result but about the therapeutic aspects of the journey itself. Enjoy this process, and don't rush it! Let gardening become an integral part of your life. You'll be much richer for it.

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Simply put, this book would not be possible without the help and advice of Teri Dunn. I am deeply indebted to her.

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As with any book project, the spouse or companion of the writer suffers from neglect. My wife, Sascha, never wavered in her patience and understanding. She has always been supportive and loving, and I'm lucky to have her as my wife!

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Introduction

Aren't you lucky! You're entering or are already part of the most popular and rewarding lifelong hobby that exists — worldwide. Gardening is a common language that knows no national, socioeconomic, or age boundaries. It's a common thread that binds all of us together. Whether you're discussing your outrageous zucchini harvest of the previous year or sharing your secret tips for prizewinning roses, you've probably found that gardeners have an instant bond, no matter what their level of experience.

Because gardening is a huge topic that encompasses a wide field of cultivation interests and disciplines, it's impossible for any one book to cover everything there is to know about gardening. However, when you're armed with the gardening basics, like those presented in this book, you're ready for just about anything that the art of gardening can throw at you.

Sure, gardening requires some exertion. But it's healthy exercise. It makes you feel a great sense of accomplishment when the flowerbeds are weeded, the bulbs are planted, and the seeds are sown. It's primal. And reaping the rewards of your labor — by cutting flowers for your dinner party or fresh herbs for your salad — is a special joy that makes the noisy, electronic stimulation that surrounds us (cars, phones, MP3 players, and the like) seem trivial. Gardening fosters a deep satisfaction that nurtures your body and soul. That's why this book, *Gardening Basics For Dummies*, exists. In addition to giving you basic pointers on how to make your gardening as successful and rewarding as possible, it's a celebration of the art and sheer joy of gardening.

About This Book

In this book, I've tried to distill my over-40-years of gardening experience as well as the knowledge of some of my other gardening friends, because we all learn from each other.

I hope this book is fun reading: Sometimes gardeners can get way too serious about this pursuit. I've always felt that gardening is supposed to relieve anxiety, not add to it. After all, this is gardening, not brain surgery! Making a mistake (and you will) is not a big deal. Gardens can recover quickly from our bumbling efforts to care for them. My main mission in this book is to bring you gardening success and the inimitable pleasure that comes from it. It's no fun if all your efforts end up in the compost pile.

Following the classic *For Dummies* format, this book gives you the most basic gardening information you need, organized and presented in an easy-to-follow, modular manner. Although you can read from cover-to-cover, you don't have to. This book can function as a reference work, so you can jump in, find what you need, and get back to your stand of birch trees or the koi pond or the garden center or wherever else you'd like to be.

After reading this book, you may not be an expert, but you should be well on your way to taking on most gardening tasks with new confidence. Gardening is part science and part art, and how you mix them up is a very personal thing. After getting a handle on the basics presented here, you can move on to develop your own style and techniques that work best for you.

Conventions Used in This Book

As you advance in gardening, you find that in certain branches of horticulture (like perennials, some trees and shrubs, and orchids), you're confronted with dreaded scientific names (usually Latin, sometimes Greek). People use such names in these plant categories for very legitimate reasons, and you can choose to follow the path to those reasons later. For now, I spare you that step by mostly using common names for the plants throughout this book. When I do provide the scientific name, I give common plant names first, followed by the botanical name.

As is typical of all *For Dummies* books, I also shy away from as much jargon as possible, and I explain any terms used right away (often in parentheses following the term). New, defined terms may also appear in *italics*. Horticulture and gardening can be as technical as any other science, but this is not a textbook for Horticulture 101!

The Internet is part of life now and can provide oodles of great gardening information, so I include various Web references. Web addresses appear in `monofont`. When this book was printed, some Web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that I haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. When using one of these Web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending as though the line break weren't there.

What You're Not to Read

If you're short on time and just want to get down to the nitty-gritty, you can skip the stuff in the gray boxes. I include this sidebar information for those of you who want to know the *whys* of everything or who just want to dig deeper.

Foolish Assumptions

Because you're reading this book, I assume that, like me, you really love gardening. Here are some other things I assume regarding your possible background and interest in gardening:

- ✔ You've seen other folks' gardens that have inspired you, so now you want to bring your own gardening skill to the next level.
- ✔ You're concerned about a healthy diet and want to grow some of your own herbs, fruits, and vegetables.
- ✔ Your lawn is looking on the tattered side, so you want to spruce it up a bit.
- ✔ You've moved into a new place, and the landscaping is nonexistent or dreadful, so you want to change it.
- ✔ You love outdoor living and you want to improve the space around you.
- ✔ You like the idea of gardening but don't know where to start.

How This Book Is Organized

The basic goal of every chapter is to give you the information you need to go out and create a garden, or at least plant something, no matter what your level of experience. You may already know a lot about roses, for example, but perhaps you want information on how to start an annual flowerbed; the chapters in this book can help out in that regard. Even if your primary interest is in growing roses or daylilies, or in setting up a basic vegetable garden, you can find useful information in every chapter that you can probably apply to your planting project.

This book includes six parts, which are further divided into chapters. Check out the following sections for an overview of what you can find in each part.

Part I: Preparing Yourself (And Your Garden) for Planting

Sometimes just getting started can be the hardest part. In this section, your wheels begin turning. Chapter 1 introduces you to the main garden players — annuals, perennials, trees, shrubs, vines, and groundcovers — and explains their roles. Chapter 2 helps you put together your grand plan and gives you some ideas of types of gardens to consider and questions to ask yourself. I explain what hardiness zones are and why should you care about them in

Chapter 3. Chapter 4 puts your spade in the ground with the basics of garden preparation and your plants' basic needs. And the right garden tools make a big difference, so Chapter 5 takes all the mystery out of tool selection and use.

Part II: Flowers and Foliage: Growing for Color

Foliage is nice, but most people are in gardening for color. Chapter 6 deals with the almost ever-blooming, frequently dazzling colors of annuals — which ones to choose and how to use them best. Recently, perennials have been the hottest category of plant, probably because of their immense variety and year-after-year performance. These repeat-performers are detailed in Chapter 7. Nothing can perk up your spirits after a long winter better than spring-flowering bulbs or give late color like the summer-flowering types; that's what Chapter 8 is all about. Chapter 9 introduces you to America's favorite flower: the rose. There, I give you tips on which roses are easiest to grow and tell you which are most fragrant.

Part III: Stretching Your Garden Beyond Its Boundaries: The Permanent Landscape

The lawn frames everything in the garden and is the family playground during the summer. Chapter 10 can help you grow a lawn you can be proud of. Trees and shrubs are considered the “bones” of the garden because they define its shape and are present for many years. I introduce you to the foundational plants that best suit your needs in Chapter 11. And don't forget vines and groundcovers — they can serve as the icing on your garden cake; I profile them in Chapter 12.

Part IV: Producing Your Own Produce

What can possibly match the flavor of your own warm vine-ripened tomatoes? Or fresh ripe strawberries and raspberries? That's what Part IV is about: home-grown produce. It's healthy and delicious. Veggies start off this part in Chapter 13, followed by Chapter 14 on the pleasures of how to grow and enjoy herbs. Chapter 15 shows you how you can have all the fruits and berries you want.

Part V: Designing Special and Fun Gardens

This part covers what gardening is really all about — fun! Chapter 16 covers the extremely popular form of gardening that even those space-challenged gardeners can enjoy: container gardening. Water gardens have become the rage because of not only the exotic plants they display but also the wildlife (including fish and frogs) that they provide a home for. Skip to Chapter 17 for details on water gardening.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

Of course, this wouldn't be a real *For Dummies* book without a Part of Tens. This part is where you go when you want information fast. Chapter 18 gives you answers to the ten most commonly asked garden questions. If you're handy and like gardening projects, see Chapter 19. Getting the kids involved in gardening early in life is a great idea, so check out the fun projects for them to do in Chapter 20.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons are the cute little pictures that show up in the margins of the book, right next to certain blocks of text. Here's what those icons stand for:



This image points out some ecological tips that you can follow and use to ensure that your gardening is truly Earth-friendly.



Gardeners sometimes speak their own lingo, which can be a bit confusing for people who are just getting their feet wet (or dirty) in the gardening process. This icon helps to identify and clarify the most common terms you encounter.



This icon points out some major ideas in the book — stuff well worth remembering.



The *Tip* icon flags notable gardening information that even experienced gardeners may not know. This info can save you time and frustration.



This icon alerts you to possible problems to watch out for or avoid. These problems may result in injury or at the very least a bad gardening experience.

Where to Go from Here

A great thing about *For Dummies* books is that you can start anywhere you want — one part or chapter doesn't depend on any other. For example, if you're interested in growing your own fruit, head right to Chapter 15. No need to start anywhere else!

That said, if you feel more comfortable getting a basic grounding (so to speak) in gardening before plunging right in, start with Part I, Chapter 1. If you're re-evaluating or starting your garden from scratch, then any of the other chapters in Part I are good places to begin. After that, where you go is really up to you, based on your most pressing gardening needs or pleasures.

Part I

Preparing Yourself (And Your Garden) for Planting

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Well, Roger wanted to design the garden, and of course I knew he was a paleontologist, but I had no idea..."

In this part . . .

Ready to do some gardening? Even if you don't think you're ready to get your hands dirty (or if you're not sure), the chapters in Part I can help you get started. These chapters give you an overview of the gardening process. They show you how to set up everything for your dream garden and generally arm you with the knowledge vital to successful gardening — which plants you can grow in your area and what they need to thrive, how best to take advantage of the gardening space you have, and how to design the right plans and acquire the right tools to make your garden a reality.

Chapter 1

Getting Ready for Gardening

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding how plants are named
 - ▶ Examining flowering plants
 - ▶ Checking out trees, vines, and shrubs
 - ▶ Managing your lawn
-

No matter what your main gardening interest — be it growing vegetables, making your yard colorful with flowers, picking out just the right tree, or aspiring to have the most gorgeous roses on the block — chances are that you care most about the plants. Sure, gardening can also involve landscaping and lawn care (see the chapters in Part III of this book), or being able to grow your own food (Part IV), or just having a great excuse to play in the dirt (Part V), but for most people, the plants make everything worthwhile.

Of course, keeping your plants alive and making them look their best involves a lot of preparation. This book contains information on caring for your garden plants throughout, but you should especially read through the first few chapters if you really want your plants to grow, thrive, and look their absolute best.

Okay, yeah, I know, you already know you need to plan and prepare your soil to get your garden going, but you *really* just want to read about plants right now, right? In that case, the rest of this chapter is devoted to the most basic explanations of the kinds of plants you may encounter in the world of gardening. Later chapters in this book go into much more detail about the various types of plants, trees, bushes, and vines, but here I help you get a sense of how plants are similar and different — the first step in turning a brown thumb green. First, though, I explain a bit about names.

Playing the Name Game

What's in a name? For gardeners, plenty. Gardening is a blend of horticulture and botany, common names and high science, and the names can get a bit confusing. Whether you're looking at plant anatomy or simply want to know what to call a plant, understanding a bit about naming can help you wade through the aisles, ask better questions, and treat your plants right.

“Hello, my name is . . . ”: Getting used to plant nomenclature

Whenever you're talking about plants, knowing how they're named can help you avoid getting tangled up in the Latin. Generally, when looking for plants and flowers, you encounter two types of names — botanical and common. Read on for some info on how the naming system works, and then *carpe diem* — *pluck the day!*

Botanical names

The *botanical name* is the proper or scientific name of a plant. It consists of two parts: the genus name and the species name. The species name is kind of like your own first name (except it comes last in a plant's botanical name). The genus name is similar to your family name (except in botanical names, it comes first). For example, in the plant name *Hosta undulata*, *Hosta* is the genus name, and *undulata* is the species name. *Hosta* describes an entire genus of famous, mostly shade-loving plants named hostas, and *undulata* describes the type of hosta it is — a hosta with an undulating leaf shape.

Sometimes the botanical name has a third name, right after the species name, known as the variety. A *variety* is a member of the same plant species but looks different enough to warrant its own name, such as *Rosa gallica var. officinalis*.

Still another botanical name that sometimes comes up is the *cultivar*, or cultivated variety. Cultivars are usually named by the people who developed or discovered them, and they're often maintained through cuttings, line-bred seed propagation, or tissue culture. In other words, they're cultivated (humans grow, improve, and develop them). An example is *Lychnis coronaria* 'Angel's Blush.'

A *hybrid* plant is the result of the cross-pollination between two genetically different plants, usually of the same species but different varieties. This combination can happen because of cultivation, or it can occur naturally through bee pollination between two different plants.

