

## A Beautiful Garden Starts Now - Memorial Day Means Gardening for Many

Written by Melinda Myers  
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Get out the shovel and trowels – it's almost Memorial Day weekend and that means gardening for many. Spend a bit more time getting your garden off to a good start and reap the benefits all season long. Proper planting and post planting care means less maintenance, fewer pests and more produce and beautiful flowers in your landscape.

Start by selecting healthy plants free of insect and disease problems. There's no need to spend money on problems. And keep in mind that bigger is not always better. Instead look for compact plants with sturdy stems. The leaves should be deep green or the proper color for that variety. Avoid plants that show signs of stress such as spots, brown leaf edges, and holes. And when all things are equal, purchase the perennials with multiple stems.

Keep your purchase properly watered before and after planting. Check transplants daily and twice a day when temperatures rise, watering as needed. Increase success and reduce the stress transplants often face. Apply a plant strengthener such as [JAZ Spray](#) to protect potted plants from drying out until you are able to plant. Or apply to transplants to get your plants off to a vigorous start. These organic products are not fertilizers but rather naturally occurring molecules that work like an immunization to help new and established plants better tolerate heat, drought, insects, disease, and other challenges plants face.

Prepare the soil before planting. Though not glamorous building a good foundation for your garden will pay off this season and beyond. Dig one or two inches of compost, peat moss or other organic matter and a low nitrogen slow release fertilizer into the top 12 inches of the soil.

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Now slide, don't pull, the plants out of their containers to avoid damaging their roots and stems. If they resist, gently squeeze small flexible pots or roll larger pots on their sides over the ground. This loosens the roots, releasing the pot from the container.

Gently tease any roots that encircle (girdle) the root ball. Or use a knife to slice through girdling roots or the tangled mass that often develops at the bottom of the pot. This encourages the roots to explore the soil beyond the planting hole. And a bigger root system means healthier plants that are more productive and beautiful.

Set your plants at the same depth they were growing in their container. Tall leggy tomatoes are the exception. These can be planted deeper or in shallow trenches to encourage roots to form along the buried stem. Cover the roots with soil and gently tamp to insure good root to soil contact. Water new plantings thoroughly; moistening the rootball, planting hole, and beyond. Spread a thin layer of shredded leaves, evergreen needles or other mulch over the soil to conserve moisture, suppress weeds, and keep the roots cooler when hot weather moves in for the summer.

Check new plantings every other day and water thoroughly and often enough to keep the soil slightly moist. Gradually reduce the frequency until your plants only need to be watered once a week in heavy clay soils and twice a week in sandy soils. Of course you'll need to water more often in hot weather.

And don't forget about the rest of your landscape. Plant strengtheners can be applied to established plants to prepare them for the often stressful season ahead. Treated plants will be better able to tolerate heat and drought as well as attacks from insects and diseases.

So get out and start planting to make this the best gardening season yet.

Nationally known gardening expert, TV/radio host, author & columnist Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written over 20 gardening books, including *Can't Miss Small Space Gardening*. She hosts the nationally syndicated *Melinda's Garden Moment* segments which air on over 100 TV and radio stations throughout the U.S. and Canada. She is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine and writes the twice monthly "Gardeners' Questions" newspaper column. Melinda also has a column in

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Gardening How-to magazine. Melinda hosted “The Plant Doctor” radio program for over 20 years as well as seven seasons of Great Lakes Gardener on PBS. She has written articles for Better Homes and Gardens and Fine Gardening and was a columnist and contributing editor for Backyard Living magazine. Melinda has a master’s degree in horticulture, is a certified arborist and was a horticulture instructor with tenure. Her web site is [www.melindamyers.com](http://www.melindamyers.com)

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