



L-R: Herbs and flowers work well together in containers or planted in beds. Photos provided by Brokor Greenhouses; Herbs like rosemary look and smell lovely in the garden. Photos provided by Brokor Greenhouses; Succulents provide easy to care for ground cover Photos provided by Brokor Greenhouses

GETTING YOUR FLOWER GARDEN TO GROW

By Lisa Crandall

The three key elements of a successful garden are soil, plants and attitude.

Successful gardening means paying attention to your soil. A fast and easy test to determine what type of soil you have is to take a handful of dirt from the garden area and squeeze it in your fist. Look at the resulting ball of dirt. Is it a hard maybe wet lump? You probably have lots of clay. Does it crumble away and fall to the ground? That suggests too much sand. If it is loose, but fibrous, and not too damp, you've been gifted with a decent loamy soil that plants will love.

If you have too much clay you need to augment it with something so that it is less likely to dry into hard pack concrete. Traditional additives include organic materials, such as mature compost, well-rotted manure and dried leaves and grass clippings left over from last season. Layer them over the ground and turn them under the soil, then leave the soil for a few days to

continue warming up before you plant. If you've got too much sand, adding compost will help here as well, by adding nutrients and helping to knit the soil together. A layer of mulch on top will help the soil hold water and at the same time keep the ground from becoming so blistering hot it bakes the roots of your plants.

Picking the right kind of plants for the garden and positioning them correctly is another key to the successful garden. Drought tolerant flowers can be lovely with their bright yellow and orange faces. Flowers in the blue and purple family tend to prefer varying degrees of shade. You might also need to move some of the plants around if a bed has been in long enough for the tree canopy overhead to have changed since you originally envisioned that specific bed.

Koren Manneck from Brokor Greenhouses in Cardinal, is finding that succulents do well in our area and require very little maintenance. Herbs offer greenery and

fragrance, as well as being good to cook with. They are very popular with her customers. She encourages her clients to consider interplanting vegetables in the flower beds. Carrots provide lacy fronds in front of taller flowers, while cut and come again vegetables like lettuce and kale, are good to eat and are appreciative of the shade provided by taller plants around them. She also finds that plants that ward off mosquitoes are increasingly popular in flowerbeds near doors and patios.

The last key to success in the garden is attitude. Remember, a garden is an evolving project that will change from week to week. If you despair when the poppies and cosmos blow over in the wind, make sure they have a fence or structure to give them shelter. Low compact plants and shrubs are less likely to get windblown or knocked flat by the rain. Many flowers such as, pansies, chrysanthemums, geraniums and petunias will continue to bloom long into the season if you keep them deadheaded. Don't rush to tear plants out when they have died back. A garden is a living demonstration of the cycle of life. Allow yourself to enjoy all the phases.

As one last note; the Old Farmer's Almanac suggests that the last frost day is after May 15. Don't get fooled into thinking it is warm enough to plant until after that date. The traditional date of planting is the Victoria Day weekend and is the best time to get your garden in. It is a tradition for a reason. LH