

Beginning a Garden in the Helena Area

Take a Long Look

- location of your garden
- sun vs. shade (long term plan to optimize sun and other considerations)
- slope (best to have a gentle slope for air drainage)
- soils (where are your best soils with least rocks or impediments,
- micro climate & air drainage)
- access to water and irrigation system tailored to site
- access for hauling materials and movement within garden (gates, pathways, slope)
- compost facility location next to or in garden
- sample your soil (County Extension or Lab) to determine what you may need
- grow green manure crops (rye, wheat, oats, peas, clover, buckwheat, oil seed radish)

Till or No-Till or Raised Bed

- remove sod (strip sod and roll up digging up soil that was below sod)
- smother sod (newspaper and soil or ground cloth or plastic)
- till sod (fall best time---add organic matter first such as grass clippings, leaves, manure or compost)
- rotor-tiller considerations; tractor mounted best for breaking up sod and incorporation, rear tiller next best, front tiller most difficult to work with
 - minimize speed of tiller when possible or move quickly over ground to be tilled
- weed management (quack grass most common problem)
 - dig out and expose roots to sun and frost for at least 3-5 days without moisture before making seed bed
 - ideally after controlling quack grass water moderately and let stand a week to 10 days then do light tillage before seeding. If time permits let sit longer for better weed control
- build raised beds and purchase top soil for quick and productive garden

Water Considerations

- City water is expensive
- Helena sits in a semi arid desert (Lewis & Clark named this area the Prickly Pear Valley)
- Think long term about how you can conserve water, obtain an efficient water system (drip systems are best, low pressure small emitters next best, soaker hose good in short term, rain birds and other sprinklers may be good but not very conserving of water, hand watering is seldom adequate and to time consuming, oscillating sprinklers are the worst (especially when the wind blows)
- Build your soil organic matter from organic sources to increase soil vitality
- Mulch---Mulch---Mulch---Mulch---Mulch---Mulch---Mulch---Mulch---Mulch**

Get To Know A Mentor Gardener (ask questions, spend time with them)

Use Northern Adapted Seeds

- Become familiar with numerous seed catalogues and seed sources
- begin saving your own seeds like peas & beans