

ROCS GARDEN PROJECT

Growing Food. Empower Futures!

Join the Community!

For ongoing support, gardening tips, and a sense of community, be sure to join the **ROCS Garden Project** group on Facebook.

It's a great place to connect with fellow gardeners, ask questions, share your progress, and access helpful resources and how-to guides.

www.facebook.com/groups/rocsgardenproject

Getting Started Guide



Welcome to the ROCS Garden Project! Whether you're a first-time gardener or have some experience, this guide will help you get started and ensure your garden flourishes. Let's dive into the essential steps for setting up your garden!

If you have any questions or need more assistance, don't hesitate to reach out to the Garden Project team. Happy gardening!

Choosing the Right Space for Your Garden

The first step to successful gardening is selecting the right location for your plants. Here are a few things to consider:

- **Sunlight:** Most fruits and vegetables need around 6-8 hours of direct sunlight each day. Find a spot in your yard, balcony, or windowsill that gets plenty of sunshine.
- **Space:** Plants need room to grow, so choose a space where they won't be crowded. Ensure there's enough space for your containers, planters, or raised beds.
- **Protection from Wind:** Wind can damage plants, so consider placing your garden in a location that's shielded from strong winds or gusts.

Container Gardening: A Flexible Option

If you don't have access to traditional garden space, container gardening is a great option. You can grow plants in pots, buckets, or even repurposed containers and storage bins. Here's how to get started:

- **Choose Your Containers:** Make sure your containers have drainage holes at the bottom to prevent water from accumulating and causing root rot. You can use plastic, terracotta, or fabric pots, depending on your preference and what's available.
- **Size of Containers:** The size of the container matters. For smaller plants like herbs, a 6-8 inch pot is sufficient. For larger plants like tomatoes or cucumbers, you'll need a larger container (at least 18-24 inches wide and deep).
- **Placement:** Ensure your containers are placed in a spot where they'll receive enough sunlight and are easily accessible for watering and care.

Understanding Seeds & Germination

Seeds are the beginning of your gardening journey. Here's a simple guide on how to start them off right:

- **Seed Selection:** The seeds provided to you are chosen based on your growing zone and climate. Check your Plant Guide for information about planting depth, spacing, and care instructions.
- **Starting Seeds Indoors:** If you're starting your seeds indoors, use seed trays, small pots, or even an old egg carton. Fill each container with a well-draining seed-starting mix, not garden soil. Plant your seeds according to the recommended depth, water them gently, and place them in a warm, sunny spot.
- **Transplanting Seedlings:** Once your seedlings have developed strong roots and a few leaves, they're ready to be transplanted outdoors (or into larger containers). Ensure the weather is warm enough, as most plants need warmer temperatures to thrive.

Soil Needs: Preparing the Perfect Foundation

Soil is the foundation of a healthy garden. Here's how to give your plants the best start:

- **Soil Type:** If you're planting in the ground, choose a location with well-drained soil. For container gardens, use a potting mix designed for containers.
- **Soil Amendments:** To improve soil quality, you can add compost or organic matter. These will provide nutrients and improve drainage.
- **pH Levels:** Plants thrive in soil with a pH between 6 and 7 (neutral to slightly acidic). You can test your soil's pH using an affordable soil testing kit available at garden stores.

Watering: Keeping Your Garden Healthy

Watering is essential for plant growth. Here are some tips to avoid over- or underwatering:

- **Consistency:** Keep the soil consistently moist, but not soggy. Water your plants when the top inch of soil feels dry.
- **Morning Watering:** Watering in the morning is best, as it gives plants time to absorb moisture before the heat of the day. Watering early also helps prevent fungal diseases that thrive in damp conditions.
- **Watering Technique:** Water at the base of the plants, not on the leaves, to avoid moisture-related diseases. A gentle watering can or hose with a soft spray nozzle works well.

Feeding Your Plants: Fertilizing

Plants need nutrients to grow strong and healthy. Here's how to fertilize your garden:

- **Compost:** Adding a layer of compost to your garden beds or containers once a season can provide essential nutrients.
- **Liquid Fertilizers:** For container gardening or when your plants show signs of nutrient deficiencies, you may want to use a liquid fertilizer. Follow the instructions on the label to avoid over-fertilizing.
- **Organic Fertilizers:** Organic fertilizers like fish emulsion, bone meal, and some manures (rabbit, duck, etc.) are great natural alternatives to synthetic fertilizers and can provide slow-releasing nutrients.

Maintaining Your Garden

Once your plants are in the ground or in containers, regular care is important to keep them healthy:

- **Weeding:** Weeds compete with your plants for water and nutrients, so remove them regularly to keep your garden thriving.
- **Pruning:** Trim back any dead or damaged leaves to promote healthy growth and improve airflow around your plants.
- **Pest Control:** Keep an eye on your plants for signs of pests. Organic options, like neem oil or insecticidal soap, can help manage pests without harming the environment.

Enjoying Your Harvest

Once your plants have matured, it's time to enjoy the fruits (or vegetables) of your labor!

- **Harvesting:** Different plants have different harvest times. Refer to your Plant Guide for guidance on when to pick your produce. Harvest early in the morning when the weather is cool for the best flavor and texture.
- **Storing:** Store your harvested produce in a cool, dry place. Some items, like tomatoes or cucumbers, are best eaten fresh or canned, while others, like root vegetables, can be stored for later use.

Start Small

If you're new to gardening, begin with a few plants and gradually expand your garden as you gain experience.

Keep Learning

Gardening is a continuous learning experience. Don't be afraid to make adjustments along the way.

Have Fun!

Gardening is a rewarding and enjoyable activity. Take pride in your work and celebrate your successes!