

“My flower beds are full of weeds. What’s the easiest way to get rid of them?” Use your weedeater to cut the weeds as short as possible. Then, cover the whole bed with a 4-sheet thick layer of newspaper. Adding four inches of mulch or compost over the newspaper will smother the weeds. **TIP:** Adopt a “no-bare-ground” policy. A thick groundcover of vinca or liriope greatly reduces weeds. Use a three inch layer of mulch until they get established.

“Any tricks to make my small yard look larger?” Divide your yard into two or three distinct garden rooms. A gazebo for quiet conversations with friends, a dining patio for entertaining, and a comfortable, private retreat for yourself. Lay paths between them, using curves wherever possible to create a little sense of mystery. Plant evergreens and shrubs to block the view from one room to another. “Crowd” the path with soft textured plants between rooms. Give each room its own focal point, like a statue or small fountain. Limit the variety of plants, but increase the amount of each by planting in drifts of three, five, or seven. Buy dwarf shrubs. Place similar color or style containers all around the garden. **TIP:** Trim old shrubs up, add compost, then plant hostas around their legs to visually expand your boundaries.

“When is the best time to prune?” Prune spring flowering shrubs after they flower. Prune summer and fall flowering shrubs in very late winter. Japanese maples should be pruned in January. Remove damaged or diseased limbs anytime. **TIP:** Use sharp pruners and clean them with a bacterial wipe between plants to avoid spreading disease.

“How do I build a brick path?” First of all, don’t use brick. They will crack over time from freezing. Use pavers made for paths. Excavate six inches of dirt (use it to make new beds). Put down three inches of crushed gravel and tamp it down firmly. Add two inches of fine sand and rake it level. Install metal edging to hold your pavers in place, then lay the pavers. Rent a wet saw to cut odd shapes. Brush more sand over the pavers to fill in the cracks. **TIP:** Make your path four feet wide so two people can walk comfortably side-by-side.



“I love to garden, but right now I can’t start my own garden. Any suggestions?” Here is the perfect solution. Join FOG. Friends of the Garden are the people who design, plant, and maintain the beautiful gardens at Nathanael Greene/Close Memorial Park. Becoming a member of FOG will allow you to enjoy gardening, make new friends, and have the satisfaction of creating a public sanctuary. **TIP:** Go to friendsofthegarden.org to learn more.

“I would love to add a gazebo to my garden. Any tips?” Make your gazebo an interesting destination by placing it far away from your back door. Build a curving path to it using pavers, flagstone, or pine straw (to save money). Raise your gazebo about 12 inches above grade and add steps to it for a dramatic entrance. Give it a very sturdy, level base of gravel or concrete blocks. Plant evergreens around it to blend it into the landscape. **TIP:** Put a generous amount of sharp gravel around the bottom edge to keep critters out.



“Can I have a nice garden without spending a lot of money?” Sure. Buy hosta, fern, daylily, liriope, vinca, and coral bells. Split them in half before you plant and again next year for free plants. Build a compost bin, throw in old annuals, ground up leaves, grass, and coffee grounds. Use it to fertilize your plants. Buy the smallest size available of fast growing shrubs like althea, nandina, forsythia, knockout roses, burning bush, and crape myrtle. Ask the garden manager for discounts on torn bags, chipped pots, and shelf-worn plants (check for good roots). Buddy up with another gardener to split bulk purchases and trade plants. Rake up pine needles. They make an excellent floor for a garden room and a long lasting mulch. **TIP:** Get free advice from the Master Gardeners Hotline 881-8909 ext. 320 or stop by the Botanical Center at Nathanael Greene/Close Memorial Park.

“How do you garden in this rocky clay?” The number one, very best landscaping idea is to build raised beds. Bring in loads of soil, mix in compost, and build your beds 8-12 inches above grade. They drain better, add a nice look, and are much easier to plant in. Use natural rock as edging. **TIP:** If you don’t do this, buy a pickaxe!



“How can I have pretty containers all season?” Start with bigger pots, at least 12 inches across. Use a 50/50 mix of Miracle Gro potting mix and shredded pine bark mulch to feed the plants and hold in moisture longer. Plant one “thriller” tall center plant, add three “filler” plants for bulk around it, and five “spiller” plants to cascade down the pot. Keep your containers well watered and feed lightly every other week in the summer. **TIP:** Going on vacation? Set your pots in a child’s wading pool ½ full of water.

“How easy is it to divide a hosta?” The hardest part is digging a large one out of the ground. Wash the dirt off the roots. Use a sharp knife to cut through the crown, between the eyes. Then pull the tangled roots apart. Each piece needs a couple of eyes and some roots. Plant them with the crown at ground level and water well. Do this in early spring or late summer. **TIP:** Join the Greater Ozarks Hosta Society to learn more about hosta care. Go to GOHS.org.

“Japanese maples are so pretty. What are the best ones?” Bloodgood and Fireglow are two top selling red leafed trees. Crimson Queen is a purple/red weeping variety. virdis, a green cascading tree, has gorgeous, multi-colored leaves in the fall. All of these are very popular. For something different, plant Butterfly, a green/white/pink variegated tree. Seiryu is a lacy green upright beauty. Beni Maiko has stunning spring and fall color. Shishigashira’s crinkled leaves make it look like it was around with the dinosaurs. **TIP:** Plant your Japanese maple tree between the sun and your favorite window for a fantastic color show.

“What are the three top tips for a gorgeous garden?” Pick a style. Curved bed borders, round garden rooms, gazebos, and ½ barrels set a casual style. Square pergolas, straight paths, and crisply pruned shrubs convey a more formal, orderly feeling. Repeating plant combinations around the garden ties everything together in visual harmony. Create garden rooms as destinations to relax and enjoy the beauty of your handiwork. **TIP:** Following a landscape design plan is a huge help. Go to SWMOgardens.com for 12 free landscape designs you can use.

“What’s the secret to a lush, green lawn?” In late March, spot spray weeds with Weed-B-Gon. Early May, spread Scott’s Weed-N-Feed on your wet lawn. Late summer, spot spray weeds again, if necessary. First day of fall, fertilize with 13-13-13. Near Thanksgiving, spread Scott’s Winterizer. Next year, your lawn should be beautiful. If necessary, aerate and over seed the following fall. **TIP:** Hire a pro for a year or two to get it in shape, then do it yourself.

“How does a gardener survive the long winters?” In early October fill pots with coleus cuttings. Once they are rooted (about a month), move them into your sunniest window for color and fresh growth all winter. By early May they can go out on your deck. If you keep black oil sunflower seed feeders full, and provide water in a heated dog dish, dozens of birds will entertain you everyday. **TIP:** Plant early spring bulbs, like crocus and daffodil, right outside your breakfast room window.

“What are the best plants to grow on the shady north side of my home?” Yews, nandina, azalea, holly, and rainbow leucothoe are great shade-tolerant shrubs. Hosta, fern, and palace purple coral bells will thrive. Use liriopie or vinca as groundcovers to choke out weeds. **TIP:** The dirt next to a foundation is usually poor; add a lot of compost for healthier plants.



“What are some special touches I can add to my garden?” Use a gate, or at least a well-defined entry to say “be prepared for something special”. Create interest with focal points. A showy or unique shaped plant, fountain, or piece of art will grab attention and stop the eye from wandering around the garden. Frame a beautiful view with an arbor or matching tall shrubs. Hide surprises along a path or in your garden room, like a family of gnomes or a colorful bowling ball. Low growers add a nice finishing touch. Hosta, fern, coral bell, and liriopie are perfect to fill in gaps, edge a path, or to cover the ankles of taller shrubs. **TIP:** Repaint or move your garden ornaments around for a fresh look each year.

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