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Working in a small biotechnology company, Leah enjoys gardening and raising chickens in Western New York. Design a Simple, Beautiful Garden Landscape My son in front of our zone 5 garden: hostas, astilbe, and daylilies grow in a lush front border. ©2012 - leahlefler, all rights reserved. Determine Garden Location and Exposure Before choosing plants or designing your garden plan, go out to your yard and observe the proposed garden location throughout the day. Is the site in full sun? Is the area heavily shaded throughout the day? Is it exposed to high winds? Is it next to a road where salt from snowplows might affect plant growth? The plants and overall design will be influenced by the amount of sun your garden site receives each day. Plants also vary considerably with regard to water needs: some plants require a lot of water, while others will die if they have "wet feet." Observe your garden site for moisture levels. The soil pH will also affect plant growth. Some plants, like roses, prefer alkaline soil. Other plants, like rhododendrons, prefer acidic soil. When designing a garden, realize that some plants will not be good companions due to their different requirements! A soil test kit can be purchased at any garden supply store—test your soil to determine its native pH. If you want to acidify the soil, coffee grounds can be added to decrease the soil pH. Add lime to increase soil pH. Plants for Different Garden Exposures Plant Exposure Requirements Soil pH Deer Resistant Hosta Shade Average 6.5-7.0 Yes Sun Average 5.0-6.7 Yes Daylilies Offer Gorgeus Summer Blooms Daylilies come in dormant, semi-evergreen, and evergreen varieties. Choose the right type for your landscape. ©2012 - leahlefler, all rights reserved. Choose Plants Suitable to Your Zone Plant choices will vary depending on where you live: the same plants that thrive in Georgia would not survive the winters in Minnesota. Likewise, some plants do better with a hard frost and would not thrive in southern locations. The USDA provides a map of gardening zones; check your location on the map and choose plants listed as suitable for your zone. Plants from warmer zones may be grown as annuals in colder zones; these plants will die in the winter and won't return the following year unless stored indoors during the winter months. Plant Groupings and Height in general, place plants in odd groupings (3 or 5 plants together). Create a repeating pattern throughout the garden: this helps tie a long border or front yard landscape together. Tall plants should be placed at the back of a garden that backs up to a house, or in the middle of an island garden. Short plants should be placed at the edges. Check the labels for all plants to determine their full height and breadth. A new garden may look a little sparse at first, but the plants will fill out over time. Planting young plants too close together results in overcrowding and plants may have to be moved or rearranged at a later date if they are planted too close together. Adding a specimen plant, like a weeping cherry tree or Japanese maple, can set a theme and add a dramatic element to the garden. Overlapping Flowering Times Gardeners in the northern states often plant flowers that flower nearly year-round. Annual plants and geraniums, coleus, and agapanthus will flower throughout the growing season. The annuals will ensure the garden is another way to achieve a lush flower bed. For example, daffodils and lilies can be planted under dahlia. The daffodils will bloom, and the fading foliage will be hidden by the emerging daylilies. The daylilies will bloom in June, and the lilies will bloom in July. This planting scenario gives the garden three months of color in the same garden section. Some "reblooming" perennials have been developed. These perennials generally bloom at least twice: reblooming in the blues, and daylilies are now coming into place in modern gardens. Adding annuals to the garden also allows for color throughout the growing season. Begonias, geraniums, impatiens, and marigolds will add a burst of color from the time of planting to the first hard frost. Plant Suggestions for Overlapping Bloom Times Plant Bloom Time Zones Hellebore Early Spring 3-9 Witch Hazel Early Spring 3-9 Forsythia Early Spring 5-9 Alum Spring 3-9 Lilies Spring 3-7 Daylilies Early Summer 4-9 Hydrangea Summer 3-9 Oriental Lilies Summer 3-9 Crocosmia Late Summer 5-9 Sedum Fall 2-9 Chrysanthemums Fall 2-9 These alliums are planted among daylilies. When the allium foliage is fading, it will be hidden by the daylily leaves. Gardening in Four Seasons Spring The spring garden is often filled with flowers—from bulbs to early blooming perennials. Make the most of this season by under-planting bulbs beneath perennials and adding a spring-blooming specimen tree (like a Magnolia Stella or weeping cherry) to the garden. Summer The summer garden may suffer from heat and lack of water. Plant lilies, lirises, and annual plants to see this season through. Look to foliage for color, too: coleus (an annual) provides an amazing burst of color to the summer garden. Hostas and coral bells come in many variegated shades. Annual plants like elephant ears can add a dramatic, tropical look to the summer garden. Fall Sedums and chrysanthemums bloom in the late summer and early fall season. Grasses are a wonderful addition to the garden, as their seed heads are as beautiful as some flowers and add both color and texture to the landscape. Deciduous bushes like Burning Bush add brilliant scarlet leaves to enhance the fall garden. Winter Add interest to the winter garden with plants that have interesting bark texture, color, and with garden ornaments. River Birch has a beautiful, peeling bark that stands out against the winter landscape. Corkscrew Hazel has an unusual branch structure that adds winter interest. Add a gazing ball, garden benches, or statues to enhance the winter landscape. This plan for a partial-shade garden uses hydrangeas, hostas, and lamium for a part-shade location. ©2012 - leahlefler, all rights reserved. Sample Garden Plan for Part Shade This garden plan utilizes three main plants: hydrangea, hosta, and lamium. Endless Summer hydrangea is a beautiful flowering plant that produces blooms all summer long. The flower color will be pink or blue, depending on the acidity of the soil. To encourage blue blooms, maintain an acid soil - for pink, add small amounts of lime to raise the soil pH. This plant will grow to 3-5 feet in height and has the same breadth. The foliage turns bronze in the fall; this hydrangea is suitable for zones 4-9. Hosta Guacamole has an absolutely beautiful chartreuse foliage. It grows 1-3 feet in height and has beautiful flower spikes in mid-summer. Unlike most hostas, Guacamole blooms with fragrant flowers. Its large green leaves contrast beautifully with the hydrangea. Lamium is a low-growing ground cover for shady locations. It grows 6-8 inches tall and produces pink flowers throughout the growing season. The foliage is silvery and really lights up shady locations. This butterfly garden plan will attract butterflies in droves. Buddleia (butterfly bush), purple coneflower, verbena, rudbeckia, and lirises are all loved by adult butterflies. ©2012 - leahlefler, all rights reserved. Sample Plan for Butterfly Garden Island Attracting butterflies to the garden is simple, and the flowers that attract butterflies are vibrant and beautiful. This garden plan uses the following plants: Buddleia Black Knight (also known as Butterfly Bush); This large, central shrub is filled with dark purple blossoms in the summer. Bloom time can be prolonged by cutting off faded flowers. This bush is approximately 6' tall by 4' wide, and is suited to zones 5-9. Butterfly Bush may die back over the winter, but will rebound in the spring. Like all the other plants in this plan, this shrub requires full sun. Buddleia will attract adult swallowtail butterflies and monarch butterflies, among other species. Purple Coneflower (echinacea purpurea) is 2-3' tall and about 1' wide. This gorgeous perennial is hardy in zones 3-9 and attracts adult butterflies in addition to songbirds. It is also deer resistant! Rudbeckia (also known as black-eyed Susan) is 2-3' tall and features deep golden flowers. Space plants 2' apart and watch their rapid growth throughout the summer. Rudbeckia attracts adult butterflies and birds. Rudbeckia is hardy in zones 4-8. Liatris Spicata (also called Blazing Star) is 2 feet tall and about 10" wide, making it a tall, narrow plant. Butterflies and bees are drawn to its spikes of purple flowers in the mid summer. Liatris is hardy in zones 3-10. Butterly Weed (Asclepias tuberosa) is easy to grow from seed, but does not transplant well due to the formation of a long taproot. This plant has a long blooming season (from May to September) and features brilliant orange flowers. The plants are 10-24" tall, slightly smaller than the Liatris. Butterly weed attracts adult butterflies and also supports Monarch and Queen caterpillars. Grow this plant in zones 4-9. Verbena "Blue Princess" is a hardy perennial ground cover that grows to a height of 6". This plant produces beautiful, blue-purple flowers that are highly fragrant. Grow in zones 7-10, or in colder areas as an annual. Questions & Answers Question: What would be a good design in Colorado for a small space? The area has full sun in the morning and I am looking for a low maintenance garden plan. Answer: Before I answer, it would be good to know what agricultural zone you live in. Colorado has USDA hardiness zones ranging from 3a to zone 7 near Pueblo. The plants you use will depend highly on your zone of residence. I will answer using Denver (ranging from zone 5 to 6), since I do not have the information of your specific geographical location. Great zone 5 plants that require little or no maintenance include: lirises, coral bells, sedum species, and daylilies. You can underplant the daylilies with oriental lilies and daffodils to provide seasonal interest. Comments Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on October 05, 2017: Thanks, Alex! It is really fun to watch a garden come to life each spring. Tell us how your landscaping design turns out! Alex Harris on October 04, 2017: Nice post, very useful. I will surely try out some of these ideas on my landscaping project. Thanks for sharing! Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on March 06, 2017: Thanks, Peggy! I love our front garden in June and July. Our summer is extremely short in Western NY, so we appreciate every day of sunshine and bright green plants! Peggy Woods from Houston, Texas on March 11, 2016: This is the time of year gardeners are planning their gardens. You certainly have a lush border with so many pretty plants in that first photo. Your son dressed in that bright red shirt makes a nice color contrast. : Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 30, 2015: We are still trying to get topsol for our vegetable garden (raised bed - we need the rain to stop so we can get a delivery! Kristen Howe from Northeast Ohio on June 19, 2015: Oh Leah, I know the feeling. My patio container garden have sprouted leaves and no flowers yet. I'm glad they're annual flowers though. Keep me posted! Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 19, 2015: I have a new raised garden bed (circular, with a keyhole cut-out) and am waiting to get dirt to fill it so I can transfer my seedlings. I wish we had a longer growing season here. Kristen Howe from Northeast Ohio on June 14, 2015: Leah, I agree with you there. My brother and SIL has a garden at their home, while I'm waiting for my flowers to bloom (some are sprouting). I would love to have an indoor herb and veggie garden, too. Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 14, 2015: I really love gardening, Kristen. This is a great gardening guide for any gardening level. Very useful with plenty of good tips. Voted up! Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on January 04, 2015: Thanks, Perspicacious! I love gardening. I hope we have a Happy Thanksgiving, too! Demas W Jasper from Today's America and The World Beyond on November 26, 2014: Fine Hub. Happy Thanksgiving to you and yours! Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 22, 2012: Oh, ighnugent17, the deer are the bane of my existence! We use Liquid Fence to keep them away from our vegetable gardens, but I had a deer eat all of my Stargazer lilies just before they bloomed! I nearly cried. They don't touch the astible, thank goodness!ignugent17 on June 22, 2012: Wow! This is a very informative hub. Now I have an idea which flowering plant to plant next year especially about the deer. Thanks leahlefler. Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 04, 2012: I absolutely love gardening. I'd much rather be outside planting something than inside baking something! We have a few vegetable gardens, too (the kids tend those), but I hope my flower beds the most. I hope you get the opportunity to plan your own garden soon - even if it is just a small container garden! Simona Haruko Smith from San Francisco on June 04, 2012: This Hub is incredible!!! Your photos and diagrams are so helpful, as are the tables! If I ever have the opportunity to start my own garden, I think I'll just print out this Hub and use it as my go-to starting guide. Hmn... I hope I'll have that opportunity soon! Planning the layout and choosing plants sounds like a lot of fun. Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 04, 2012: Oh, Zone 2 must be so limiting! I suppose you really focus on plants that have good form the winter - I know maples can survive in low level zones. I don't think I'll complain about our six months of snow ever again, brsmom! I hope you enjoy your (short) summer! Diana Ziomek from Alberta, Canada on June 04, 2012: I love gardening! I live in Zone 2 so my plant choices are often limited, especially where annuals are concerned. Many need several weeks of frost-free temperatures, and we often see frost the first week of June. It can return as early as August, accompanied by several inches of snow. Voted up and useful - you have a remarkable Hub! Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 02, 2012: I absolutely love gardening. On, I usually pick a few plants and try to repeat the pattern, including different textures and foliage colors. Thanks for your comment - I think my little guy is adorable, but I'm obviously quite biased! Om Paramapoonya on June 02, 2012: Thanks for sharing these garden planning tips! Your advice is very detailed and easy to follow. And that picture of your son in front of the garden is so adorable! Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 02, 2012: Thanks, Angelo! I'm in the process of designing a deer proof, shade friendly garden for the backyard around our decks. I love the growing season! Angelo52 on June 02, 2012: Great garden ideas. Liked looking them over. Voted up! Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 01, 2012: I hope you get a yard (or some place to grow a container garden) some day soon. I find great enjoyment in our yard. We have a small apple orchard, raised bed vegetable gardens, and our "pretty" plants in the front yard. We also get a lot of wildlife - bears, deer, turkey, and foxes are a frequent sight in our yard! Linda Chechar from Arizona on June 01, 2012: Such wonderful advice! I'm so jealous of your lovely landscaping! Your Hub is such a great reference. I really miss not having a yard. I understand the feeling of satisfaction. I'd get looking at all the other plantings and the associated wildlife they attract. Voted up and useful! Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 01, 2012: The rock garden is a wonderful! I really want to get some ideas for ours! I absolutely love them - they're my favorite! Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 01, 2012: An amazing article! Robert Erich from California on June 01, 2012: An amazing article. My brother and I are working on starting a garden. I will have to refer to this article more in the future. Leah Lefler (author) from Western New York on June 01, 2012: We have a spot in our yard that seems to kill plants - no matter what we plant there! It is close to the house and I think the soil might not be deep enough, so I'm going to amend the soil, raise it up, and try again. We have a deer problem, too, so we are constantly on the lookout for deer resistant plants! Kristi Sharp from Born in Missouri. Raised in Minnesota. on June 01, 2012: This is very helpful. We had our yard professionally landscaped and several plants failed and died the first year. It was disappointing and the company didn't do anything about it. Looking back, I should have researched but I didn't have the time or energy. I'm going to use this information and re-do! Fantastic!

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