



# How Does Your Garden Grow?

With geraniums and petunias all in a row.

By Susan Kehoe, Ph.D.

Photography by Gene Meadows

Ready for a run to the big box store to pick up geraniums and petunias again, or prefer to wander the aisles of gardening stores making selections based on all the appealing colors? It should be no surprise that there are apps for that — advising you on what, when and where to plant the perfect garden.

It was easy to google free apps for how to plant a garden. The *Better Homes & Gardens* (BHG) site, a name that has been around since 1922 and has been the fourth best-selling magazine in the U.S., appeared first. The site header read, “In just a few minutes, you can create a garden design plan for a beautiful yard at home on your computer screen.”

We tried it. After taking the online test that asked a few short questions about climate, sun and size of plot, they sent us a Northern Garden Plan. The plan advised planting shrub roses, sedum and daylilies to provide lovely flowers all season long. It even included a diagram of where to put the flowers and how to mix them. In fact, the BHG online searchable encyclopedia, with seemingly infinite choices, allows you to drag and drop trees, bushes, flowers and plants right into your diagram. Then, you can take a virtual online tour of the garden you just created.

If you want sources to purchase your plants and flowers nearby, they have that, too, or BHG can simply ship whatever you want right to your doorstep. (Or there’s always Flower Day at Eastern Market in Detroit on May 15).

## MASTER GARDENERS

Master gardeners thrive in Metro Detroit, and we wondered how they approached a gardening project. Beth Lilley, master gardener and co-chair of Gardens Management at Cranbrook Home and Gardens, said, “Gardeners need to test the soil, observe the sunlight at all times of the day and determine the irrigation system. You can’t have clay soil and shade and expect to grow a country garden.”

A master gardener since 1997, she talks about gardening as a trial-and-error process. “To be a good gardener you need to love it: Visit the plants, talk to them, fuss around with  
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brook gardens and pick up some locally grown flowers, the annual 2016 Spring Plant Sale at Cranbrook takes place May 10-11.

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**

Those of us who enjoy the view more than the process become acquainted with landscape architects. One of the finest in our area is Michael Dul of Michael J. Dul & Associates ([www.mjdul.com](http://www.mjdul.com)). He sounds more like an artist than a gardener because he talks about design elements and “seeing the entire canvas.”

Over the years, Dul has designed many types of gardens.

“Every garden is unique,” he says, “not only because of the conditions, but also because of the client’s intent: Do you need to screen another house for privacy, soften the view of an air conditioner or garage? Do you want to buffer noise? Frame an entryway or gate? Invite butterflies and humming birds to your patio?”

Just as designing rooms within the house, gardeners and clients must determine the purpose of the outdoor spaces.

“Evergreens serve as the backbone of the garden — they are the first layer that define the perimeters and borders of the garden,” Dul said. “Many people don’t realize that evergreens, trees, bushes and shrubs should not be added last to fill in dead space — they come first to define the space. Flowers don’t drive garden design, they come at the end to provide a spot of color that lasts for a very short time.”

Dul has brought his vision to various kinds of gardens, such as the shade garden, the meadow and the entry garden.

For example, he created a shade garden for one of his clients who built a new house but wanted everything to look old.

“He told me he wanted to go outside and feel as if he were living on the family homestead in Ireland,” Dul explained. So he made the tiny yard into its own world, with circular shapes that conjured larger winding space. A stone walkway with moss planted between the stones leads to an iron gate. He added a water feature near the terrace where reedy wild grass and iris look as if they were always there. Dragon blood sedum display a delicate texture, reaching above mounds of yellow coreopsis, just as the grass and iris contrast against the dark, rugged rock.

Dul makes frequent use of raised gardens, except when working on a large, flat meadow garden stretching across an acre or more. “One owner used the porch daily and liked to entertained guests

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the flowers and keep a gardening journal to record what works.

“Many people take up gardening to balance their lives with their careers and to experience a sense of calm,” Lilley said. “That’s what I did before I retired. Cranbrook gardeners nicknamed me the ‘stealth gardener’ because I came to garden after work when no one was around. The next morning, they noticed the work was mysteriously completed.”

Her most important tip for good gardening is composting, a process she meticulously manages all year-round instead of using commercial soil, pesticides and chemicals.

The Gardens Management at Cranbrook Home and Gardens has about 300 volunteers with 50 core gardeners, the largest volunteer gardening organization in the country. If you’d like to see the Cran-

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Cutlines

in that spot, so she wanted a wild, rambling view,” Dul explained.

He planted black-eyed Susans to wander among white sedum and interspersed two kinds of grasses for texture and contrast.

The owner of a 1928 vintage home wanted Dul to create an entrance garden for his guests to walk through on their way into the house. However, the driveway stopped at the front door and had to be pushed back to make room for raised terraces. “Raised beds were essential,” Dul said. “It makes room for new soil where plantings will thrive. We make our own soil with a special mixture of sand, soil, compost and chicken manure. I’ve never seen anything so effective and the clients love it.”

Dul filled in the design with large hydrangeas, wispy Japanese maples and ground cover that transformed the entry into a moment of joy and unexpected pleasure before entering

the house. Needless to say, the guests were charmed.

This summer you have choices for the garden. Whether you decide on using a computer website, enrolling in a master gardener course or contacting an expert landscape architect, have fun creating the garden of your dreams. **NS**

### FOR MORE INFO

**Michael J. Dul & Associates**  
212 Daines St, Birmingham;  
(248) 644-3410  
www.mjdul.com

**Better Homes & Gardens**  
Plan-a-Garden website: bhg.com

**Cranbrook House and Gardens**  
380 Lone Pine Road  
Bloomfield Hills; (248) 645-3147  
housegardens.cranbrook.edu

**Oakland Master Gardeners Program**  
mgsoc.org; (248) 858-0902