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Plan Before You Plant

By Jean Fritz

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It's winter, and as you gaze out your picture window, all you see is a 50 square foot patch of bare dirt. After a foray through the top 10 plant catalogues armed with a major credit card and your vivid imagination, that space is crowded with shrubs, bedding plants, bulbs and foliage, all competing for light, water and nutrients. You've created a plant riot.

Planning is vital to creating a noteworthy garden, and winter is the best time to sit down with pencil, paper and reference books. A good garden plan can save time, money and heartache.

SET YOUR SIGHTS ON YOUR SITE

Where is your future garden located? Is it visible to the entire neighborhood, or to your eyes only? Does it receive full sun, or is it shaded part of the day? What is the soil type? All of these factors need to be considered during your planning phase, and will help you screen out your plant choices.

DO YOU HAVE A PURPOSE IN MIND?

Your site may also help determine the garden's purpose. I have two beds within 5 feet of my kitchen door, so they are dedicated to herbs and salad fixings (I can come home from work, pick dinner, go inside and eat.) If your garden is surrounded by a privacy fence, you could consider installing a wildflower plot, or a garden designed with birds and butterflies in mind. These garden styles tend to be unruly, so cloaking them from potentially offended neighbors or homeowners' association spies is a good idea.

Deciding on a particular theme or purpose for the garden plot further narrows your plant choices.

HOW MUCH MAINTENANCE IS INVOLVED?

If you are a harried homeowner with less than 2 hours a week for yard work, installing an annual bed or vegetable garden is not for you. The time you are willing to devote to maintenance is important in

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choosing plants; the less you want to work, the more you'll want to stick with tried, true and dependable plants such as daylilies, hosta, iris, and groundcovers such as ivy or dead nettle.

If, on the other hand, you relish "fussing," annuals, vegetables, fruit trees or fruiting shrubs (such as raspberries, blackberries or currants), and tea and shrub roses can be added to your landscape. These plants all require routine maintenance including trimming, pruning, weeding, deadheading, and regular pest control.

SIZE, PROPORTION AND BLOOM TIME

A plant's final size - height and width - are also important factors in choosing plant material. Plant size should be in proportion to the size of the bed and the size of any buildings or fixtures. If you've ever

seen foundation plants that have overshadowed the home they were supposed to compliment, you'll know what I mean. Those overgrown arborvitae eventually have to be cut down and dug out, which is backbreaking labor, or expensive if you have to hire a Bobcat. Better to plant with the end result in mind.

Bloom time is your final consideration. You may choose to create a mixture of shrubs, bulbs, perennials and annuals in your bed, which will produce a long period of blooming as each group flowers successively. You may decide that one splash of color, followed by a pleasing palate of green, is more to your liking. Knowing when a plant shows its best side (and what it looks like afterward) can help you choose whether that plant belongs in your yard, or if you'll maliciously suggest it to your crabbiest neighbor.

Take the time to plan before you plant, and you'll be rewarded with seasons of color, fragrance, and garden health.

The author operates a small market farm in east-central Indiana. Her ezine, Leaflets, covers a host of gardening and cooking topics. Subscriptions are free via the KittyVista website (<http://clik.to/kittyvista>)

The Orchid Plant: Important Aspects

By Claire Quaty

The orchid plant is a beautiful, if somewhat delicate plant. The orchid plant, with a little care, can make a showy addition to any home. Once you understand their needs, orchids can become reliable plants that add beauty to any room in your home.

When you are choosing an orchid plant, it may seem like the choices are endless, and for good reason. All orchid plants belong to the family known as Orchidaceae, which is one of the largest families in the world. There are nearly 30,000 species of orchids available, all with their own wonderful characteristics.

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There are, however, similarities among the orchid plants. Most orchids grow best in a warmer temperature. Unless you live in a reasonably tropical zone you will not be able to grow orchids outdoors. With the right arrangement in your home, you should be able to grow most commercially available orchid plants in your house.

While keeping the orchid plant in an area where it can enjoy a warm temperature is important, equally important is the need to regulate the humidity and air flow in the room. Orchid plants will grow best when they are in a room with an above average amount of humidity. Keeping your orchid protected from drafts is also important as well. Do to their inability to withstand drafts and their need for a high humidity level, orchid plants often do well when placed in the bathroom of a home.

You can not forget about light as well when looking for a location for your orchid. While the orchid plant needs a good amount of light to bloom, it is often difficult to find this perfect spot. Many times the obvious choice, by a window, will leave the orchid exposed to too much air flow. Orchid plants can also be grown under lights, and there are many wonderful grow lights available that will fit into a traditional light socket.

By growing your orchid plant under lights, or at least having the light available, in case your planned location does not work out, you will help keep your orchid plant happy. While the orchid plant may seem demanding, it really is consistent in its needs. Once you have devised a plan to raise your plant, you will likely enjoy its showy blooms for years to come.

How can you tell if you have the best possible location for your orchid plant? While an orchid can live in less than ideal conditions, it is not likely to bloom in them. If your plant is still green, has plenty of leaves, and otherwise looks healthy, but has yet to bloom, you may want to reconsider its living conditions. Try moving your orchid plant to an area that is warmer, has more light, or a higher level of humidity. If these changes do not help, your orchid may need to be repotted.

Once you have developed a plan to successfully raise orchid plants, you may want to add to your collections. With a wide variety of commercial plants available, with many different characteristics, there is an orchid plant for everyone. Whether you make your choice based on fragrance, bloom, or by just picking the one you like best, orchid plants make a great choice for the serious gardener, or the casual hobbyist.

The latest work of Claire Quaty can be found at:



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