

SELECTING THE GARDEN SITE

Introduction

The location and physical characteristics of a garden directly influence its use and success. Locating the garden next to a canyon or open field will invite wildlife to dine on the crops. A shade garden may provide a restful spot for outdoor classes and reading, but is a poor choice for growing vegetables.

When selecting a location, carefully consider the needs of the plants, which will be grown in the garden, as well as the needs of the people who will learn and teach in the garden. A garden will get more attention and be easier to use if it is located close to classrooms.

Gardens are difficult to relocate once installed and a poor location can severely limit plant performance and the garden's contribution to the learning process. Involve as many people as possible in the selection process. Include administrators, teachers, grounds maintenance staff, students, and volunteers.

To create a garden that will flourish, evaluate the following elements before determining location.

Size

A garden can be small with one or two planters or large with several raised beds. The area selected should be large enough to allow easy access. A site that provides opportunity to observe and room to work will encourage participation and enhance the learning experience. [Click here to link to Garden Design Size for more information.](#)

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Sunlight

Six hours of direct sunlight are necessary for growing most flowers and vegetables.



If possible, monitor potential sites at different times of the day and in different seasons, especially winter, to determine shade patterns created by nearby trees or buildings. Remember, shadows are longer in winter than in summer. [Click here to link to Garden Design Sun Exposure for more information.](#)

Water

How water enters and moves through soil is also important. Plant roots need water and oxygen to flourish and adequate watering is essential to ensure a bountiful harvest.

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The garden should be located as close as possible to a water source. Carrying buckets or dragging a garden hose from a distant faucet is time consuming and awkward.

It is also helpful to have a nearby water source for washing hands and cleaning up garden tools. [Click here to link to Garden Design Watering Systems for more information.](#)

Soil

Choose an uncontaminated site, avoiding areas that have been treated with persistent herbicides or with lead based paints or other toxic pollutants. A healthy crop of weeds is a good indication that cultivated plants will grow. Less time and effort will be required to prepare the soil prior to planting if a site with good quality soil is chosen. [Click here to link to Soil Management Soil Texture for more information.](#)

Drainage

Good drainage is essential. A low area that allows water to collect or extremely poor or compacted soil that inhibits water absorption will discourage the most determined gardener. Building raised beds makes it easier to add amendments such as compost and gypsum to improve the quality and drainage of the soil and provides easier access for small gardeners.

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Gardens can be built on any terrain, even a hillside. However, gardens located on level ground are less expensive to install and easier to maintain. Soil erosion can be a problem on steep terrain and low spots where water stands are not good for plants or people. A slight slope will allow surface water to drain away. Runoff should flow to a drainage channel or culvert.

Security

A fence surrounding the garden will discourage unwanted pets, dodgeballs, bicycles, and the occasional mischief-maker. A chain link or wire fence provides security without blocking light or air circulation.



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A living fence can be created by planting vines or hedges appropriate for your climate zone. If you are starting from scratch, however, it will take a long time for this to be effective. Keep in mind this type of fence may also create unwelcome shade on the garden and roots may compete for water and nutrients.