



Cultivate Your Garden

April showers bathe your yard, leaving green grass, soft soil, tall weeds and lots of work! But a little effort now can spare you from hours of yard work later.

Start out raking your entire yard to remove sticks and leaves. Cut dead limbs from your trees. Then remove old mulch and debris from your flowerbeds and loosen up the dirt around them.

Now is a good time to launch an offensive attack against weeds. Your hands make the best weapons. Old-fashioned hand weeding effectively controls weed growth and spreading. Use a hoe to fight off annual weeds before they set seed; hoeing can spread them.

Mulches can also stifle weed growth if you apply a 5 to 7 centimeters thick layer to your garden. Black plastic laid across the soil's surface can prevent annual weeds from seeding. Mulch helps the soil retain more water and regulate temperatures. Clay soil loses more water than sandy soil and always needs mulch.

Healthy soil promotes the growth of healthy plants, which are better equipped to resist weeds. To add more nutrients to your soil, use mulches that are decomposing (such as manure or compost) rather than bark or wood chips.

Before planting, test your soil to determine its pH level and chemical composition. Your county agricultural extension agent or local garden center will do this for a small fee. Most offices provide a sterile container to hold your sample. They will also give you a questionnaire about your garden, your residence, and the types of plants you wish to grow. Dig five holes that are six-to-eight inches deep in the area you will plant the garden. Take a one-half inch slice of soil from the side of each hole and place it in the container. Use clean tools. Mix the soil then spread it over a newspaper to dry. Then give it to your extension agent's office. A soil analysis usually takes two to three days.