

actsmart[®]

starting from scratch

Whether you are starting a new garden, or re-establishing an old one, this fact sheet will help you to prepare your soil, choose appropriate plants and design a garden that will be suitable for Canberra's climate.

By asking yourself a few simple questions you can save time, money and water by designing a garden around your likes and dislikes, the local environment and your family's needs.



What type of garden do you want?

- formal and neat?
- seasonal displays of colour?
- low maintenance bush garden?
- simple design of a few shade trees and grass?

Be realistic at this point; many of us would like a carefully manicured, neat formal garden but not all of us have the time or resources to maintain such a garden in our challenging climate.

How do you use the space?

Would you like to spend your time pottering in the garden or would you rather sit at a window and see a view? Do you have a family who use the space outside?

Draw a sketch of where you'd like trees and garden beds, where the kids would like to play or where you'd like to stretch out with a book. While in your garden take careful note of where the sun is, where the wind comes from and where there is natural shade.

How's your soil?

Is your soil hard, compacted and dry? Are you starting from scratch or reinvigorating an old garden?

Your soil type and condition will determine:

- how much water it can hold
- how long it can retain water at the root zone
- how many nutrients will be available to the plants
- how much water you need to give your plants in addition to rainfall.

Careful preparation of the soil assists both with drainage and water-holding capacity. It also provides plants with essential nutrients.

The information you need to prepare your soil can be found in the Importance of Soil fact sheet.



Do you understand your microclimate?

Garden micro-climates can be used to improve the success of your plantings by taking advantage of the varying conditions. You can use hot sunny spots to grow succulents, moist shady locations for ferns, or north-facing brick walls to grow plants which need more warmth in winter.

When planning a garden take note of where the sun is at various times of the day and the areas that are sheltered when hot winds are blowing. Think about whether a clever tree planting or a well positioned windbreak might lessen the impact of the sun or wind. Make note of the sheltered and unprotected zones in your garden and seek advice from your nursery about appropriate plant choices for each area to suit your overall garden plans.

Consider staggering your planting by establishing the upper storey with shade trees first and then planting underneath in consecutive seasons.

By taking care when planning your garden, carefully altering the microclimate and selecting your plants wisely, you can improve the success of your garden and also save water. See the Microclimate fact sheet for more details.

Plant choices

The final component of a successful garden is your plant choices. The type of plants you choose depends on your preferred garden style, the soil you have, how sheltered your garden is and how much effort you want to expend on your garden. The best places to find out about plant choices are garden centres and nurseries. The staff will give you advice about what plants fit with your plan and how much care they will need. You can also use the Canberra Plant Selector tool on the Actsmart website (www.actsmart-plantselector.com.au) to identify different plants that might be suitable for your garden.