

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE NURSERY

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In order to get the most out of your shopping experience here at Farmington Gardens, we have compiled some information that may be helpful to you in choosing plants and finding your way around. Some terms used in the nursery world can be confusing, and by understanding some of these key concepts, you can have a more successful gardening experience!

DECIDUOUS: This means that the plant will lose its leaves in the winter.

EVERGREEN: Evergreen plants should keep their leaves all year long. They may not stay the same color though, as discoloration can be common in the winter months.

SEMI-DECIDUOUS & SEMI-EVERGREEN: Essentially the same thing, the plant will keep or lose its leaves depending on the weather. Colder weather will cause more leaf loss, whereas in a warm winter, only a little leaf loss may occur.

ANNUAL: A plant that lives for a year, and then dies. Some plants that are grown around here as annuals are really perennials in warmer climates, but do not make it through the winter here. Sometimes, in a mild winter, some annuals will survive and come back. Don't expect this though, and annuals are usually weak and generally inferior if they make it to a second year. Annuals usually give the most extended color during their designated season, and are simply pulled out and thrown away when they are done.

PERENNIAL: Perennials come back every year. Most go dormant in winter, a few go dormant in summer, and some are evergreen. They don't bloom for the length of time that annuals do, but they put on incredible shows when they do bloom, especially as they mature. Perennials can come in several subcategories, two of the most important being "*short-lived*" and "*tender*". Short-lived perennials are usually some of the heaviest bloomers, but they pay for that by having shorter life spans than others. The upside is that they usually reseed prolifically, keeping the flowers coming. Tender perennials are those that are generally okay outside around here, and you can keep with a little extra effort. If left in the open with no mulch, and a severe freeze comes, you will probably lose them. A little winter protection though, such as mulch or storing in a garage for the winter, and you should be fine.

BIENNIAL: There are just a few plants in this category, most in with the perennials. Biennials develop foliage their first year, bloom their second, and then usually die (this is known as a monocarpic plant). Sometimes they will last longer, but they are often very weak and unattractive after they flower and seed. Biennials often set more than enough seed to keep you well stocked even after the original plants die.

ULTIMATE PLANT SIZE: Our signs generally list the mature size of a plant. The mature size can take many decades to reach, or in some cases centuries. Most plants will not be around nearly that long in a home situation, or will not ever reach that size due to local conditions. A tree that reaches well over 100' in its native environment for example, may only reach 50'-60' reasonably in a landscape. Keep in mind that evergreens usually have a longer life and growth period (often measured in centuries for some of the biggest), whereas most deciduous trees will approach their peak in a much shorter time frame (a few decades). Not to say that you should put a tree that will reach 100' tall 5' from a house, but take the *landscape* size (usually only ½ to 2/3 the mature size) into consideration when picking a tree or shrub. *Small* trees usually reach 20' or more eventually. There is really no such thing as a tree that grows really fast to 12' tall and then stops, but there are trees that grow moderately into the 10'-15' range and then slowly creep towards the 20' range. If in doubt, ask.

CONTAINER SIZE: This is one of the most confusing things to some people. Nursery pots are sized by a number, i.e. #1, #2, #3, etc., with several variations of some of these available. The nursery lingo for this unit is a "gallon", sometimes shortened to "g", "G", or "gal". Please note that a nursery gallon has *absolutely nothing* to do with the liquid gallon measurement used for gas and milk. So if someone at a nursery says something about a "5 gallon can", they are referring to a #5 container, which can be one of several different variations on the #5 theme. 4" pots are rarely 4 inches in diameter, usually being around 3.5" or thereabouts. It's the accepted term for the very common small pot size used for bedding plants and some perennials. The best thing you can do is to look at some of the containers to get your bearings, and always check the label if you are not 100% certain.

SUN / SHADE: Sun and shade requirements are really more of an obscure concept than a concrete fact. We do our best to label them as appropriately as possible, but sun and shade can mean so many different things in so many different situations. Full sun in an established planted area, nicely mulched and properly irrigated is far different than full sun out in the middle of nowhere with no mulch and only hand watering, or in areas where heat is reflected off of an object. Full Sun does not mean “Blaring Heat”. Many plants like to be in full sun, but fail in the heat. Often times “full sun-part shade” simply means “does not like a lot of heat”, but this can really vary. Shade can also really vary, from dense deep forest shade to filtered small tree shade. Just because a tree likes some shade doesn’t mean that it doesn’t need light; very few plants will thrive in extremely low light situations. Often a shade requirement is given due to low heat tolerance. On the other hand, putting the wrong plant in too much shade can lead to problems such as insects and diseases, wild leggy growth, and poor flowering. The important thing is to take the exposure suggestions as a guideline, and not a rule. Again, if in doubt, don’t be afraid to ask about it!

B&B and BAREROOT: B&B plants are field dug, with burlap wrapped around the rootball for protection. They are sturdy and locally adapted, but often very heavy and they need to be monitored closely for water need the first few years. Larger plants are usually B&B. Bare-root plants have been pulled from the ground with no soil around the roots. We *sometimes* sell a few bare-root plants, but they are not nearly as reliable as containerized or B&B plants, so we keep this bare-root to a minimum.

HARDINESS: This is a very difficult concept to sum up, but we do our best to give you an accurate answer. Our *absolute* lowest temperatures around here are usually around 10°F, and it would be very rare to see temperatures drop below that. On average, this area is fairly mild and rarely drops even into the 20’s. However, Western Oregon is also full of microclimates, and temperatures can vary dramatically even within a few miles. There can be warm pockets and cold pockets, and windy areas can drive the temperature down. In addition, hardiness is the lowest temperature that the particular type of plant has been observed to survive at. This doesn’t mean that the plant will be very happy with you afterwards, it just won’t be completely dead. If you aren’t prepared to give some winter protection if necessary, give yourself a few zones (10°-20°) of padding when choosing plants. Also, two major factors -the age of the plant and the time of year- determine hardiness. A new planting is much less likely to survive a harsh winter than an established planting. An older plant is stronger and has a better ability to negotiate a hard winter. A new plant only has a few roots and a branch or two to work with, and may just turn up its toes if things get too bad. The time of the year also plays a big role. Plants acclimatize gradually in the winter months, and need some time in colder weather to adapt and prepare for severe cold. So, say a cold snap hits us with 20° temperatures in late October, without any real cold beforehand; most plants would be nowhere near adapted yet. Plants that are normally hardy to 10° or well below could die from the shock and lack of acclimatization. If you would like to know more about our temperature zones, we are in USDA hardiness zone 8b, and Sunset Western Garden book zone 6 (This can vary slightly in this area). **A fair weather warning:** Oregon is unpredictable, and we often have strings of unusually warm winters followed by a major deep freeze. This leads many gardeners to get a little overconfident and a bit too brave in their endeavors, ultimately resulting in major heartache and disappointment when that deep freeze finally comes and blows the tops out of their Hebe hedge. Just because it worked one year doesn’t mean it will the next.

ON LANDSCAPE DESIGN: There are many people who claim to be experts in this area, and even more books written by these people trying to tell everyone else how to lay out their gardens. That’s all well and good, but it has a lot of people spooked into believing that if they don’t plant their garden in a certain way, it will be a failure. The truth of the matter is, the heart of gardening comes down to what you as an individual like. There are many good designing points and suggestions to be taken, and many beautiful landscapes to be inspired by, but if everyone went “by the book” gardening would become very boring very quickly. The question shouldn’t always be “do these plants all line up on the color wheel, give the perfect balance of form and texture, and match everyone else’s idea of a proper garden”, rather it should be “I really like the look of these plants together, would they actually grow together and in the area I’m thinking of?” Don’t be afraid to experiment with your garden, that’s how we learn. And if you don’t get it completely perfect the first time (which no one does), just remember that gardening is all about change.