

Give Your Plants a Great Start in the Garden

Adapted from the Texas Master Gardener Handbook

Acclimating—Hardening Off

Plants that are purchased as ready to transplant into your garden have probably been grown in a greenhouse environment and have not been exposed to the outdoor elements (wind, cold or warm temps, direct sunlight, and pests). Greenhouse grown plants are healthy and disease free, but need to be conditioned to the location they will be planted in.

Plants need to adapt to the new environment; this is called Hardening Off. This process can take a few days depending on the weather. You will need to gradually expose the plants to the light, wind, and current temperature over several days for a week. Especially if the temperature is fluctuating, cold for a few days, then warm, then cold again.

- Set plants out in filtered morning light for a few hours.
- Each day extends the time of exposure as well as the amount of light. Watch for signs of overexposure such as wilting, yellowing leaves and/or dry soil.
- Do not transplant it into the garden in full sun for at least a week.

Transplanting in the Garden

Several days before you plan to add the plants to the garden prepare the soil by adding any additives that need time to breakdown such as manure, etc.

On the day you move the plants to the garden add compost to the area and mix in.

Several hours before transplanting, water the plants thoroughly. Do not allow the roots to dry out completely. Handle the plants with care to prevent disturbing the roots or stems. Gently remove the plant from the pot by gently tapping the side of the pot and sliding the plant out, keeping the existing soil around the roots to help protect them.

Transplant Depth

Check the recommended spacing for each type of plant to ensure there is enough room for growth at maturity. (Plant Spacing for plant bought at our sale can be found in the plant description handout.) Additionally, set the plants at the depth or slightly deeper that they were planted in the pot.

Dig the hole larger than root system and set the plant in the hole and press soil firmly around the roots. Pour 1 cup of starter solution around the plant (see fertilizer section for details).

Fertilizing

Fertilizer is the food for plants. It is made up of 3 elements nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) potassium (K) mixed in various combinations depending on the needs of the plant: Nitrogen provides leafy top growth, phosphorus for root and fruit production and potassium for cold hardiness, disease resistance; and general durability.

A good starter solution can be made using a balanced fertilizer such as 20-20-20. Mix 1-2 tablespoons of the fertilizer in 1 gallon of water. Apply 1 cup of the solution to the hole of each transplant. Do not over fertilize as this can cause burn damage to the roots and plant.

Be careful to follow manufacturers' recommended guidelines for additional fertilizing during the growing season.

Master Gardener Handbook. Edited by Jayla B. Fry, 7th ed., Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, 2019

ONLINE RESOURCES

Visit the AgriLife Bookstore!

For more information on varieties, planting and maintenance of your vegetables and herbs, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service has a number of publications available including:

- **Aggie Horticulture:** <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>
- **AgriLife Extension Bookstore:** <https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/s/>
- **Aggie Horticulture Vegetables Resource:** <http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/>

For additional information or to receive printed copies of a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service publications, contact the

- ***Master Gardener Help Desk at 281-341-7068 or***
- ***Visit the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners' Website and Social Media***
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Landscape Success (LS) Virtual-Zoom Classes

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Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Fort Bend County

1402 Band Road, Suite 100

Rosenberg, TX 77471

281-342-3034 Fax: 832-471-2400

<http://fortbend.agrilife.org/>

Call the Master Gardener Help desk with all of your gardening questions!

Fort Bend County Master Gardeners, Inc.

<https://fbmg.org>

281-341-7068

Email:

fortbendmg@fbmg.org