

What to plant in your garden to make a big impact next year – by Jenny Mandt, Owner, Garden Coaching Solutions

“In a bulb there is a flower, in a seed an apple tree...” is a song about planting today to reap the rewards tomorrow. Why not plant something now that will make your garden shine next year? With a little planning, digging, and effort the results will be worth it. First thing is to check out your soil. Is it as hard as a rock, sandy, grey and lifeless looking? This should be corrected before you plant anything. New or divided plants, shrubs or trees will need fertile, well-draining soil in order to thrive. Adding soil building compost can really boost nutrition in lifeless soil.

Bulbs – planting bulbs can be a labor of love – by that I mean that you have to work to put these in but once they are in the ground, you will reap big benefits in the future. You might look in catalogs to get ideas as there is an amazing array of what can be planted now for a great return of color next spring or summer. It is handy to have a metal bulb hole digger and some bulb fertilizer. Read the package on how deeply the bulb needs to be planted. The handy thing about a bulb hole digger is that it has measurements etched in the metal so you know how much soil to take out. Dig to the correct depth; place a tablespoon of bulb fertilizer in the hole (for daffodil or tulip size bulbs, less for crocus size bulbs). Place the bulb in the hole with the roots side down (those are the stringy things on one side of the bulb) and fill in the hole with soil and water bulbs deeply.

Perennials – This is the time of year to get some great deals on perennials as most stores want to sell inventory. They may not look healthy now, but if you keep them watered and they are in good soil, perennials will look great next year. You can also take perennials that are in your garden and divide them. This can control the size of the plants, rejuvenate them, or increase their number. Dividing and replanting keeps rapidly spreading perennials under control. Dividing perennials is an easy and inexpensive way to gain additional plants for your garden or you can have a perennial swap with friends or family – they get some of your overgrown day lilies and you can have some of theirs. This is a great way to have something new in your garden next year. Make sure the plant is no longer flowering, so when you replant it, it can use its energy to grow new roots and leaves. Water the plants a day or two ahead of being divided so they will be easier to remove. Use a sharp shovel to dig down 4 to 6 inches and dig out the entire clump. Shake off the excess dirt and take off any dead leaves or stems. If there are many roots intertwined together, you can cut 3 to 5 clumps using your hands or cutting shears. If there is one main clump of roots, use a sharp knife to cut the plant apart. If you are dividing bearded irises that have rhizomes (thick stems that grow horizontally along the top of the soil) you will need to trim the leaves 6 inches from the roots and cutting the roots to 4 inches long. Plant the cut rhizomes on the top of the soil in their new location. After dividing and planting these divisions, make sure you water them well.

Shrubs and trees – After our recent two hot and dry summers, some of your trees or shrubs may not look healthy. You can improve their appearance by cutting out the dead wood or you can dig them out and purchase new ones. How can you tell if something has died? You can use your fingernail or a dinner knife to gently rub away a spot on a branch. If you see any green under the bark, it is still alive. If you see brown, it's dead. If you choose to plant new trees or shrubs, there is a proper way to plant. You should dig the hole at least twice as big around and deep as the pot the shrub or three times the width and depth of the pot the tree came in. If the soil is poor, you may want to add 1 part compost to 3 parts soil in the pile and mix it together before putting it back in the hole. Once you have loosened the roots of the root ball, the roots can grow in a natural outward pattern rather than in a pot shape. Place the soil back in the hole and press down on the soil as you go to remove any air pockets. Make sure that you use enough soil so it is level with ground around the plant. Water well, at least ½ hour with the hose trickling twice a week or until it starts raining daily again.

If you follow these instructions to add some new or divided plants, your garden can look lush and healthy next year. If you need help with bulbs, trees, shrubs, or need other gardening tips, my contact information is: (206) 915-0585 or email me at gardencoachingsolutions@gmail.com and we can go through it together. Happy Fall gardening!