

Ask a Master Gardener  
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### Where Do I Start With My Planting Beds?

Q. My yard is totally out of control. Where do I start?

A. You are in luck, the Carroll County Master Gardeners are sponsoring a “DIY Home Landscape” workshop this coming Saturday, April 2, from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. One of our featured speakers is Elise Cormier. Elise is a conservation landscape architect and is one of the principal architects of Smart Landscapes, located in Marietta. She will be talking about native plants in the landscape. Another featured speaker is Jim Harrington of Jim Harrington Garden Design in Alpharetta. He is a horticulturist specializing in landscape design, and will be discussing the basics of landscaping. Carroll County Master Gardener Barbara McCormick will allow you to explore your artistic side by showing you how to add to interesting artistic pieces to your landscape. Last but certainly not least, Randy Cooper, a Certified Arborist, will show you how to prune those out-of-control trees and shrubs.

You don't have to tackle the whole yard at once. The place to start is with the area that bothers you the most, whether it is the area around your front door, or an area tucked away by your shed. Decide the purpose or use of the area. Do you want a relaxing space where you can sip some iced tea on a hot afternoon, or are you looking to make a statement as you enter your front door? Then you have some questions to answer. One of the most important ones is “how much time do I want to spend working in this area to keep it looking nice?” Knock Out roses are beautiful but you have to spend some time weekly “dead heading” the plants. Arkansas Blue Stars (*Amsonia hubrichtii*), on the other hand are very low maintenance; you can just sip tea and admire their beauty.

Native plantings are a popular and environmentally friendly way to go. They are used to the hot, humid summers so they do not need as much care. They are less susceptible to local pests and diseases. They also serve as host plants for the local bird, butterfly and insect populations, providing food and shelter for numerous species. The non-natives usually do not support the varieties of wildlife that native plants support. Elise Cormier will discuss twenty of the most common native plants for use in the home landscape.

Be very aware of the amount and type of sun that your plantings will get. Some plants need deep shade, like ferns and certain varieties of hostas. Some can survive some direct sunlight IF it is morning sun, for example Columbine and Hardy Begonias. Some plants such as Summer Snapdragon (*Angelonia*) and Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias*) thrive in that hot, full sun environment.

You also need to be aware of the soils in your yard. Yes, I said soils, plural. The soil in your vegetable bed may need different nutrients than the soil in your lawn or the soil in your rose beds. Your best bet is to have the soil tested before you rejuvenate an area. The plants that are growing there may have depleted the soil of certain nutrients. Even if you change the plants, you may not get those full gorgeous plants you are hoping for if you do not replenish the soil nutrients.

The same goes for water. Be aware of the low spots in your planting beds. Some plants do not like to have “wet feet”, they will develop root rot and die. Other plants do not mind a slightly wet environment and some plants need an environment that is consistently moist to thrive.

A word to the wise, before you start digging up your beds or your yard know the location of your lines...power, water, sewage, phone, etc. You do not want to dig anything up by mistake!

If this all seems over whelming, come to the Master Gardener’s “DIY Home Landscape” public workshop on April 2. There will be plenty of experts to help you get started and support you in your adventure. I think of it as an adventure because you never know what that final product will look like. A wise gardener once told me that if you do not move a plant at least three times, it probably isn’t in the right spot.

Call the Master Gardener Extension Office to make your reservation. The cost is \$15 and includes lunch. For more information or answers to any of your gardening questions, contact a Carroll County Master Gardener Extension Volunteer at 770-836-8546, via e-mail at [ccmg@uga.edu](mailto:ccmg@uga.edu) or visit our office in the Ag Center at 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton.