

V O C A B U L A R Y

GARDENING
TERMS DEFINED

A Vocabulary Primer

Gardening is one of the most popular hobbies in the United States with an estimated fifty-five percent of households participating annually. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it is estimated that 18.3 million people tried gardening for the first time. As many are discovering, gardening can be a rewarding pastime, but new gardeners may find the terminology confusing, misleading, or frustrating.

Understanding these terms is crucial to making informed decisions when selecting plants for your garden. Here's a guide to help you decode key gardening terms and set yourself up for success.



Outsider Tip

Visit with Master Gardeners at the Flower and Garden Show March 21-23, 2025 at the QCCA Expo Center.



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Annual

A plant species that completes its life cycle, from seed to flower to seed, within a single growing season. Annuals are classified as hardy, half-hardy, or tender. These classifications reference a temperature range needed for germination. Hardy annuals tolerate the coolest temperatures, even being able to withstand a light frost. Half-hardy annuals tolerate long periods of cool, damp conditions but are damaged or killed by a frost. Tender annuals need warm soils and warm air temperatures to germinate and grow.

Biennial

A biennial plant completes its life cycle in two years. During the first year, plants produce vegetative growth. During the second year, plants produce leaves, flowers, and seeds before dying.



Perennial

A plant that lives for more than two years. Perennial plants are divided into two classes: woody and non-woody. Herbaceous perennials produce non-woody above ground growth that usually die back to the ground each winter. The root systems survive winter and produce new herbaceous growth each year. Above ground woody plant material contains lignin that gives it strength, new growth occurs on twigs and branches each year rather than dying back to the ground.

Direct Sow

Direct sowing means planting seeds directly into the soil where they will grow to maturity, rather than starting them indoors or in containers. This method works best for plants that don't transplant well, like carrots, radishes, and beans. It is crucial to make sure to wait until the soil is at the recommended temperature for the specific plant before sowing.

Deadheading

A cultural practice of removing faded or spent flowers from plants. Removing spent blooms can encourage additional blooming, prevent the plant from spending energy on seed production, reduce future 'weed' challenges by reducing prevalence of seeds, and create a more attractive appearance.



Cool Season

Cool-season plants thrive in cooler temperatures, typically in early spring or fall. They can tolerate light frosts and prefer temperatures between 50°F and 75°F. Examples include asparagus, beets, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, leek, lettuce, onion, peas, radishes, spinach, and turnips.

Warm Season

Warm-season plants need warmer temperatures to thrive and cannot tolerate frost. These plants are typically grown in late spring and summer, with ideal temperatures ranging from 70°F to 90°F. Examples include beans, corn, cucumbers, melons, peppers, tomatoes, squash, sweet potato, pumpkin, and watermelon.

Thinning

Thinning is the act of removing some seedlings after they've sprouted to prevent overcrowding. This allows the remaining plants to grow stronger and healthier by reducing competition for nutrients, water, and light.

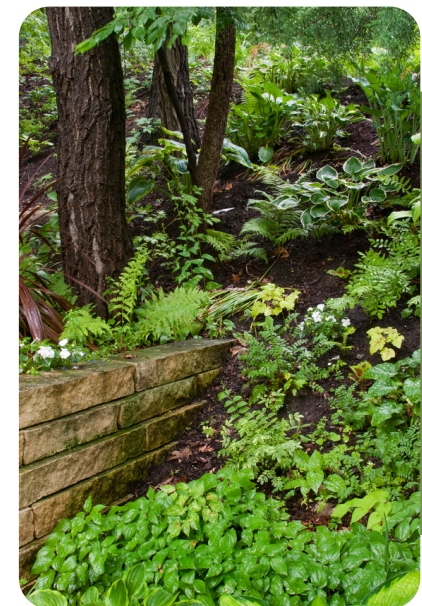
Sunlight Requirements:

Sunlight requirements tell you how much light a plant needs to thrive:

- **Full Sun:** Plants require at least 6-8 hours of direct sunlight daily.
- **Part Sun:** Plants that prefer 4-6 hours of direct sunlight daily, usually in the morning or late afternoon.
- **Part Shade:** Plants prefer 2-4 hours of direct sunlight daily, usually in the morning or late afternoon, preferring less intense light.
- **Full Shade:** Plants require less than 2 hours of sunlight daily, thriving in dappled light or deep shade.

Outsider Tip

Check out this [When to Plant](#) chart to time cool and warm season crops.



Indeterminate vs. Determinate

All plants are either indeterminate or determinate. For the home gardener, knowing the difference is especially important when selecting tomato cultivars.

- **Indeterminate:** These plants grow and produce fruit continuously throughout the growing season. They tend to be large and require staking or support.
- **Determinate:** These plants grow to a specific size and produce all their fruit within a short period, making them ideal for canning or preserving.

Heirloom

Cultivars of plants that have been passed down for generations, often tracing their history back to before 1951. Often prized for exceptional flavor profiles. Cultivars may have lower disease resistance and shorter shelf life than newly developed cultivars.



Hardiness Zones

Hardiness zones are geographic regions defined by their minimum winter temperatures. The USDA Hardiness Zone Map divides North America into 13 zones. Knowing your zone helps you select plants that can survive your local climate. For example, Zone 5 plants can tolerate temperatures as low as -10°F to 20°F.

Days to Maturity

This term refers to the number of days from planting a seed or transplanting a seedling until the plant is ready to harvest. Understanding this helps you plan your garden and stagger harvests for continuous production.

By becoming familiar with these terms, you'll be better equipped to choose plants suited to your garden's conditions and your gardening goals. Whether you're planning a vegetable patch or a flower bed, understanding these concepts will help you grow with confidence and enjoy the fruits (and flowers) of your labor.



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