

## Planning a New Garden Space

By Heather Bryant, Extension Educator, Agricultural Resources

I got a visit a couple weeks ago from a representative of a summer program for school age children. His organization intends to plant a garden with their students next spring and they wanted information on how to get started. (I love it when people plan so far ahead!) Now is actually the perfect time to plan where to install a new garden next year, whether your idea is an ambitious one involving community support and youth education or a simple backyard garden for your own pleasure.

The first thing you need to do is decide where you want to put the garden. Obviously, you want a spot that has good sunlight, adequate drainage, a nearby source of water, and a minimum of weeds and stones. You don't want it to be somewhere where it will be hard to get to, or in the way of cars, lawn mowers or foot traffic. (Realistically, you may not find such a place on your property and so you may have to make some compromises.)

When I went through this process for my home garden last year, I actually chose two potential sites based on the traits above and then in the fall, I soil tested them both to see which was better in terms of pH and fertility. Fall is a great time to test your soil for several reasons. First the lab is less busy in the fall, so you will get your results quicker. Second, if your test comes back saying that your pH is low and you need to add lime, you still have time to do it before winter. Lime works fairly slowly so if you apply it in the fall, it has additional time to work before you plant in the spring. And most importantly, it will tell you now what fertilizer you will need to add in the spring, giving you ample time to plan.

While the plan for my home garden was to use the soil tests to rule out a site, they actually showed the two sites were basically the same in terms of pH and fertility. They also showed that neither site contained significant lead levels, which was important to me as my plan involved edible plants. Since neither site got ruled out, I decided to use both, one for perennials and one for annuals, so that I could separate the two management regimes. Another common reason people might choose to have two garden sites is if the pH requirements are different for their intended crops. Maintaining one contiguous garden site with two different pH regions is difficult, the most common example of this I see is a garden with both raspberries and blueberries. Blueberries do best with a pH of 4.5 – 5.0 whereas raspberries do best between 5.6 and 6.2. Your soil test results will help you determine if your intended crops require different pHs.

Once your site is chosen you can move on to the details of needed tools and supplies, garden maps and activities calendars. UNH Cooperative Extension has a number of fact sheets that will help you plan your new garden space, to find them go to [http://extension.unh.edu/resources/category/Home\\_and\\_Garden](http://extension.unh.edu/resources/category/Home_and_Garden) or ask your local librarian to see our resource notebook.

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