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Given up on your green thumb? Get back in that garden, the experts say —

LET IT GROW



IF YOU'VE EVER TRIED TO MAKE THINGS GROW IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD, CHANCES ARE YOU'VE CURSED THE CLIMATE OR THE SOIL AT SOME POINT.

You're not alone, says Jimmy Turner, director of research at the Dallas Arboretum: "Dallas is cursed with a climate that ranges to all extremes." And the soil? "There is no such thing as too much compost," he adds.

But, Turner says, there is a silver lining in our cloud of gardening discontent. We are blessed with being in a "cross-road area," he says. "We're not too far north, south, east or

west. We can grow a huge range of plant material that gardeners outside of our area cannot."

And, he says, if gardening is in your blood, you shouldn't let a little heat and clay-packed soil get in your way.

"Gardening is about expectations, patience and learning. I am constantly surprised by plants I thought would never survive here, that have performed exceptionally," he says. "Never be afraid to experiment in your own garden."

To help get you started, we sat down with Turner and three area master gardeners to find out what works for them, what doesn't, and why we shouldn't all feel like crabgrass and trash trees are the only things we can grow.

with patience, planning and compost, you can succeed / STORY KRIS SCOTT



PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT BUNCH

LINDA MCKAY Master gardener and member of the Herb Society of America

What are your favorite things to grow?

McKay specializes in herbs and perennials. "I am particularly fond of English lavender," she says, but warns that "it can be a bit disappointing" in particularly humid years. *Salvia greggii* is another favorite. "It is one of the only shrubby plants that will bloom almost all summer." Topping off her list? "I always try to plant some kind of tomatoes,"

she says. "My favorite is Sweet 100. It truly does produce hundreds of small cherry size tomatoes all summer — the kind you want to eat right off the bush!"

What is the one greatest tip you can give to a neighborhood gardening novice?

McKay says gardeners would do well to learn proper

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Let it grow

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watering techniques. "Almost all the problems that I have seen in gardens, lawns or indoor potted plants were a result of over-watering," she says. "It stresses plants and doesn't develop healthy root systems. That leads to all sorts of other damage and insect invasion."

JIMMY TURNER Dallas
Arboretum director of research



What are your favorite things to grow?

Bulbs and perennials top Turner's list. "I have been obsessively collecting bulbs since I was 12 years old. Every time I move, my yard looks like a war zone, because every bulb goes with me." When it comes to bulbs, his two favorite two groups are narcissus and lilies. "Perennials are my second favorite," he says. "I like tough plants that are easy to grow."

What is the one greatest tip you can give to a neighborhood gardening novice?

"Two words, carve them into your shovel — BED PREP!" Turner says. "No matter how much you spend on plants, fertilizer, books, landscape design, water hoses, irrigation, etc., nothing will give a

beautiful garden like good soil preparation." When it comes to compost, he says, "get whatever you can get your hands on, as much as you can afford." Turner uses up to a foot of well-decomposed compost, then adds another 4-6 inches annually as mulch. "OK, so I'm a little compulsive about my bed prep," he admits. "But trust me — it pays off."

C.A. HISCOCK

Master gardener and recent recipient of a horticulture degree from Richland College

What are your favorite things to grow?

Hiscock likes native plants, including the virburnum, a large shrub that, she says, shows "great rosy red foliage in the fall," and inland sea oats, which like dry shade. "It is an informal plant, grassy, about two feet high, with interesting seed pods in the fall." Among non-native

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ROSA SCHACHLE

Master gardener, Dallas Arboretum Herb Garden and Polk Elementary Herb Garden volunteer

What are your favorite things to grow?

Schachle is to the point when it comes to her favored plants. Flowers? Iris. Vegetables? Arugula, "or nearly all of the greens," she says. And when it comes to fruits, she's torn: "It's a draw between figs and pears."

What is the one greatest tip you can give to a neighborhood gardening novice?

"My greatest tip is to start out slowly," says Schachle, who maintains a 5,500-square-foot garden at her home. "Learn everything you can by reading, attending gardening lectures, observing those 'experts' you know (and their gardens). And don't be afraid to ask questions. If possible, select a mentor. And

remember that even the best of us [gardeners] don't always succeed because of heat, cold, etc."*

but well adapted plants? "I love nandinas," she says. "There are a lot of new varieties, but I'm especially fond of the large old kind that have berries."

What is the one greatest tip you can give to a neighborhood gardening novice?

"Plants are the easy part," Hiscock says. What you really need is a plan. "Think about how you are going to use your garden, and how much time (or money) you are willing to spend." Also, she says, "think about how you want the garden to feel. Stimulating? Tranquil?"



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