

# ***OUTDOOR GARDENS***

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## **LAS VEGAS STYLE**

*A Guidebook by Kristina Pearson*





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## CHAPTER 1 - PLANT CARE INTRODUCTION

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Growing outdoor plants and gardens in Las Vegas is easy when planned. The hot desert sun can damage any plant, even the desert cactus and succulents. When planning a backyard garden area, consider shade. Patio covers; pergolas and gazebos are hardscape features that provide permanent shade and protection from the rain. Planting shade trees offers filtered sun and interesting light effects. Backyard pools need an open space that is free from garden debris. Everything blows into a pool and creates havoc.

North facing backyards offer the most shade while south or west facing backyards are hot and sunny in the summer. Typically, our backyards have a block or stucco style wall. When planning your backyard, watch how the sun travels across the yard to figure out morning light from hot afternoon sun. Backyard space has become much smaller than in years past. Water restrictions constrict a pool size to 600 square feet in size, which is quite large. During the planning stage of your backyard, you can decide where to place a covered area, patio area, walkways, and shade trees. Most covered patios are attached to the house and are not too flexible in location. However, the surface of the patio can make all the difference in the world. Cobblestone and other natural stones are popular for patio areas. Plan separate areas for sitting, gardening, play areas and evening activities. Once you have a landscape layout in your head, you can begin to fill in the blanks.

Raised vegetable gardens are popular and easy to install. Vego has nice metal garden beds that come in a variety of colors, lengths, and styles. This allows you to control the soil and weeds easily with a contained area. Vego offers bins on a base with legs for herbs and small flower beds, trunks, and stems. For backyard with a up-slope, a retaining wall with terraces offers a beautiful garden area. Homes with a side yard offer added areas for vegetable gardens.

Homes in Las Vegas come with an irrigation valve area already plumbed for the backyard. It is an easy weekend project to build your own drip watering system in the backyard. Choose a valve box with 2 valves for 2 separate watering lines. This will allow for different watering schedules. A flower or vegetable garden has different watering needs than shrubs and trees. Big box stores, local nurseries and the water department have demonstration gardens with irrigation and planting ideas. You can attend their free classes.

In building your backyard, build out your hardscape first which is the patio area, decks, walkways, water features, and so forth. Then place the trees. The trees may look small at first, but they do grow fast in this region. Choose the smaller decorative trees. Large Mesquite, California Pepper, Desert Verde and so forth will be too large for a typical backyard. It is a constant effort to keep these trees to a manageable size and their root systems are invasive. These size trees are the best in a park environment. Date Palm and Mexican Fan Palm trees grow tall and require annual trimming. Once they reach over 10', you will need a professional tree trimming service. There are smaller palm specimens that are better suited for backyard landscapes. Keep your trees pruned annually to keep a display shape and size. This goes for fruit trees as well. Planting citrus, and other fruit trees in the ground requires pruning to keep the fruit and an easy height to harvest. Citrus grows well in pots and can be moved around for the right exposure year around.

Perennials are plants that come back every year. They are typically dormant in the winter and pop back out in the spring. Lantana is a popular ground flowering plant that is in this category. It comes in a variety of colors and grows well in our desert climate. Perennials need to be cut back in the winter. I cut mine back in January around President's Day. They grow from the ground up and branch out quickly so cut them down quite short. If you let them go, next year's plant will be sprawling and unattractive. Perennials will bloom all season or bloom in the spring and again in the fall. Roses are in this category and bloom twice. In July and August these plants will look their worst. They are tolerating the heat. Keep their soil moist and they will come back. Lantana will just bloom all season, and it does require pruning. Gardenia grows well both in pots and in the ground. These are easy to propagate to increase the number of plants for the next year.



Annuals are plants that are a splash of color in the spring and in the fall. They bloom early and are gone before the summer heat. These are popular in pots around patio, deck, and balcony areas. These are the colorful plants you see as you walk into the market and just can't deny. Some of these will keep through summer when protected and bloom again in fall. Morning sun is all they can tolerate, and they require daily watering, especially hanging baskets.

When reading plant labels at the nursery or big box store, check the "full sun" label. Full sun does not mean full Las Vegas sun. It means partially early day sun. The afternoon reflective sun is damaging to all plants. Although they may tolerate the all-day sun, they will not thrive. Building a garden area with taller shrubs will offer shade for these plants. Cacti and succulents fall into this category. Mature cactus plants can manage the desert climate. Cacti looks better in our gardens than in the hot desert. We have better soil, we fertilize and offer water, so they look their best in our environment. However, if you have a hot spot in your yard, a cactus is an excellent choice. They do not need to be on the same watering system though and they will need sandier soil. Consider a large pot that you can control the soil and water.

Scour the garden department for distinctive style plants. The plants are delivered all season and change as the season changes. Visits to the garden department throughout the season to enjoy all the different varieties of plants. Buying small plants can be beneficial. They are easier to plant, and you can control their growth and shape better than larger plants. Plants grow faster than you think, and it doesn't take a 4" potted plant to become that more expensive 6" potted plant. Look for new growth on the plants when choosing a healthy plant. Avoid stringy plants. The rack with the dying plants is challenging. They are reduced in price and often will not recover. If you see one that you think you can salvage, pick it, and give it ICU treatment when you get it home. It can be a fun challenge and rewarding when it comes back to life. It may be the next season for some.

We can grow fruits and vegetables in any backyard or front courtyard space. We can grow on balconies and patios. The biggest concern is the sun. Herbs need shade or limited filtered sun. I have found that they grow in the ground as well as in pots. When you provide sun protection such as landscape shade material, your plants will produce better crops. Many vegetables have large leaves that protect their fruit. Tomatoes need protection or the skin is too tough. Plan a garden that gets morning light, and you will have a nice harvest. Suburban growers may be plagued with rabbits. I have my veggies on raised beds and pots to protect them, especially the tomatoes and herbs. When you plant in raised beds, you can control the water, soil, and fertilizer. Vegetable gardens should be on a different watering line than trees and shrubs. I water mine by hand. In the morning when I return from my early morning run, I water the raised garden beds. If you are out of town, you will need someone to help unless you have the raised beds on a watering system.

You can prune any plant into a desirable shape. If you have a professional landscape crew that comes in monthly, you know what they do to shrubs. All shrubs are an unnatural shape when they finish. Shrubs need legs. Keep the bottom of the bushes trimmed up off the ground. The stem or trunk should be visible. You can thin out the interior or prune off certain areas to create a favorable shape. Mock orange bushes need to be kept small rather than unnaturally large. Hand pruning is best to remove certain branches as opposed to running around the exterior with a chop saw type of equipment. When you hand prune your shrubs, they will show off their manicured appearance and provide superior styling.

Plants need to be individual plants rather than growing into other plants. Keep plants trimmed or pruned so that they can be displayed as individual plants rather than a glob. If you are planning an English or cottage garden, they the plants may run together a bit. However, these types of gardens are a tough customer in our desert heat.

I am not covering Orchids. I don't grow Orchids and cannot claim to be a particularly useful source. They need specific soil conditions, watering, and environmental elements. They are gorgeous to display; I am not the one to care for them.

We have water restrictions that make growing a lawn challenging. Since 2023, natural front lawns are no longer allowed. If you have one, it is grandfathered. We use synthetic grass. People coming from other regions nearly gag when they hear synthetic grass. They refer to it as artificial turf. Synthetic grass has improved over the decades and is identical to the real thing. It is soft, green and looks very natural. Synthetic grass in backyards is easy to keep, and no lawn mower or



sprinkler system is needed. Dogs may not approve of synthetic grass and there is a solution to that. You can build a small area for dogs. Try decomposed granite which is a fine sand like medium. It packs down nicely and is not messy. You can build an appealing area for dogs. Consider a small stone or brick wall to separate it from the other areas. You can border it with shrubs or flower beds. It is easy to keep clean. You will not miss stepping in dog do in the grass.

We have strict watering restrictions for homeowners. We water 1 time on an assigned day in the winter, 3 days in the spring and fall and 6 days in the summer. Never on Sunday and not between 11:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Keeping a natural style lawn is challenging in our environment. Grass is not native to this area. It is prone to disease, dehydration and it requires fertilization, constant seeding, and a sprinkler system. Golf courses till their grass in the fall and re-seed every year to keep their fairways looking like grass. It is not a promising choice of landscape material. In Las Vegas we have better choices than a lawn for landscape designs. If you come from the east coast or deep south with sprawling lawns, it is something you will get over. It is simply a different region for plants. In fact, most of the plants you knew in other regions are not found here in the desert.

Popular landscape ideas in Las Vegas include hardscape like extended patio areas, decks, pergolas, covered patio areas, covered outdoor seating areas, fire pit seating areas, outdoor kitchens, and BBQ islands, raised garden beds, water features and yard art. We can spend most of the year outside and with covered seating areas, firepits and outdoor fireplaces, winter temperatures are easy. Backyard lighting adds evening enjoyment. Plus, the big treat is that we do not have mosquitoes or other flying insects that plague other regions. We don't have creepy bugs or reptiles to ruin our evening parties. We do have cockroaches, scorpions, and some spiders around. These are typically controlled with pest control maintenance.

There are some plants that won't survive in the Las Vegas climate. The garden nurseries and garden stores will not carry items that won't grow here. Japanese Maple, outdoor ferns, ground moss are a few. Obviously, these need a cooler summer temperature and humidity to thrive. A tough one is Hydrangea. If you get one going, it may survive. It will need protection from the hot afternoon sun. It's just tough to get going year after year. Orange trees are not as easy as lemon, lime, and grapefruit. I don't know why. The best place I grew citrus was on the east side of my house which had morning and early afternoon sun then shade from about 2pm on. That area grew everything.

Our biggest nemesis in Las Vegas is the hot desert sun. We are keen on building covered areas and planting shade trees for protection. When planning a backyard design, these elements are installed first and then embellished with gardening fun.

If you have no plans for a garden or organic landscape, there are many choices to create a beautiful landscape. Look into synthetic grass with square steppingstone pavers. Cement planters with artificial plants. Covered patio areas. Outdoor BBQ Island or kitchen. A firepit seating area. We have garden centers with large outdoor sculptures and metal plants that are dramatic. Add some outdoor lighting. You don't need organic plants to make your outdoor space special.

No matter how you design your outdoor space, make it your own. Make it a place to entertain, find solitude, and enjoy the outdoors. Whichever way you make your outdoor space, keep it clean. No space is attractive with an accumulation of organic debris and stored personal items. You can find a small portable rechargeable blower to make it easy. These are usually labeled "patio sweeps."



## CHAPTER 2 – PRUNING AND PROPAGATING

Pruning, cropping, trimming, chopping, cutting are all the same. Pruning reduces the size of a stem to shape or reduces the size of the plant. Typically, cutting a stem just above a leaf cluster or node will encourage the plant to produce another stem. This will shorten the length of the stem just cut and create a new stem. It creates lushness in bushy plants. The same method is used to reduce the length of a leggy stem such as climbing or trailing plants. The plant will produce another stem of new growth that is not as leggy. Pruning is also a method used to shape a plant. Certain branches are removed to create a certain shape. Bonsai gardeners will cut certain branches to thin out a plant. Then they will use Bonsai wire to shape a branch. They will do this again over a period of years to create the shape they want. Pruning will aid the plant to grow a thicker trunk or main stem and more delicate outer branches. All plants require pruning at a point.

The part of the stem you cut from the main plant can be propagated. You can cut a 6" stem, remove the bottom leaves and place it in water to grow roots. Once rooted, you can plant it as a separate plant or plant it back in the mother plant if you are growing a lush style plant. It is important that you have at least 2-3 leaves in tact for photosynthesis. You can place the stems in wet soil to root. There are other methods of propagating trees that are a bit more complicated and typically for outdoor trees. To propagate stems in water, it is important that only the bare stem is in the water, if you have leaves in the water they will rot. The same is true if you are propagating the stems in wet soil. Certain plants like to dry the stems a bit to develop a stub for protection. You can pat a little cinnamon (from Viet Nam or Sri Lanka for quality) on the ends of the stems before placing in dirt or water. This will encourage root growth and protect stems from bacteria. There are also root dust products on the market that do the same thing. The natural method is highly effective.

You can propagate more than one stem. Depending upon the type of plant. You may prune more than one branch or stem. Once you have propagated multiple stems into plants, you can create a larger, more lush plant by adding them back into the mother plant pot. You can use the new plants as gifts. The propagated plants will be the same age as the mother plant, so your new plants are not the micro mini plants you often find in the store. Chopping a Monstera is done to reduce the height of the mother plant. Typically, the newly propagated plants become the primary plant, and the mother is used for propagating. You can add the new plants into the mother plant's pot if you want multiple plants. This method is typically used when the mother plant has lost the bottom leaves leaving the base bare. Trailing or crawling plants work well for propagating. It keeps the main plant healthy and lush.

Rosemary is an easy plant to propagate. Cut a 6" stem length. Gently remove the lower 2" of leaves as you avoid damaging the bare stem. Dust the stems with rooting material or cinnamon. Place tiny aquarium rocks in a glass jar, set the stems into the rocks, and add water. Add water every few days as needed. Ensure that no leaves are under water, so it does not rot. In a couple of months, you will have several rosemary plants as gifts or add to your garden. This same method works well with geraniums. Propagate in spring or summer for the best growth before planting. Planting outdoors is best done in early fall. You can winter your new plants indoors over winter as needed. In Las Vegas, our winters are not too harsh. Just the same, your baby plants will need protection.

I cut my pomegranate tree back in winter and I prune it all summer. Once the fruit is visible, it is easy to find which branches to prune. I do this with my citrus trees. This keeps the tree size short enough for me to harvest without ladders. The tree will provide just as much fruit since it is healthier and does not have a huge leaf area to feed.



## CHAPTER 3 – POTTED PLANTS

Plants will either stand upright like a tree, climb up a pole, crawl along a flat surface or trail down. You can train your plant to stand upright by pruning. A climbing plant has air roots that cling to a surface to climb up. A crawling plant will spread along a flat surface. When choosing a pot for your plant, consider if you are expecting a trailing plant, a climbing plant, or an upright plant.

Urns are tall and offer an attractive height for trailers. They also offer a dramatic base for small trees and slender shrubs. The plant may not need as deep of a pot as the urn or tall planter has. Fill the bottom with wadded up paper, strips of cardboard (without tape or labels), Styrofoam or rocks. If you need a planter with some weight, use some rock to anchor it. If you need to move your planter around, use a dolly or avoid the heavy rocks.

Pots will need a base. There is short 2" round metal bases, wood bases, bases with wheels and other styles available. Setting a pot on a patio area will stain the area. If you set your pot in the garden, the roots will anchor into the ground. If you use a saucer, the saucer may not drain and will cause root rot. The best choice is a plant stand or base that is not solid so the pot can drain properly.

Terracotta pots will absorb moisture from the soil and may dry the plant roots. Keep these watered. You can simply spray the outside to keep them from drying. You can use a terracotta pot as the decorative planter base and set your plant in a plastic container inside.

Plant walls are tough in our climate. If you have a shady backyard or a covered and protected patio with a wall for vertical plants, go for it. We average about 15% humidity which dries out a vertical garden in no time. If you do plan a vertical garden, ensure it is on a medium that is attached to the wall with separation. If you place the plants directly on our stucco exterior walls, the roots will quickly attach and cause damage.

Plastic planters can get hot in the summer and burn roots. Plan the location of your pots out of the late-day sun. Ensure the pot is large enough with sufficient soil to protect roots. Consider placing a plastic planter inside a decorative clay, wood, or ceramic pot. It is easier to re-pot as it grows. All pots require adequate drainage. Inspect your pots regularly to ensure no roots are growing out of the holes or clogging the drainage.

Trees, shrubs, vegetables, flowers, and ground cover all grow in pots as well as the ground. The benefit of the pot is flexible placement for show and protection. You can paint the exterior of aging pots for a colorful garden. The trick is to keep the plant pruned to support a proper size for the pot unless you plant to move it as it grows. The upper structure should not be excessively more than the root ball. The root ball should not be root bound. Some plants enjoy a snug fit, and no plants want to be strangled.

Placing solar lights on potted plants adds an evening charm. If you have an electrical source available, any type of lighting can be conducted.

Keep the pots clean of mold. Mold is harmful to the soil and will damage the plant. Moss is a natural material and will not harm the plant. However, moss may begin the decay of a clay pot.

Use a top dressing in pots. It will protect the plant base and keep the soil moist and in place. River rocks, bark, driftwood, shells, glass marbles and so forth make decorative toppings. Save old strainers and colanders. They come in handy in the garden when re-potting plants with a top dressing or decoration.





## CHAPTER 4 – SOILS, SOIL MEDIUMS AND NATURAL FERTILIZERS

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Soil, light and water. Without these elements your plants cannot survive. There are several types of soil for several types of plants. You can create a general planting medium for your flower gardens, pots, vegetable gardens or general garden areas. When you have a specific need, you can mix in a specific medium for a particular plant. Most of the bags of soil come with fertilizer. You will be fertilizing throughout the season so any dirt will do for the most part. If you find that your choice includes too many rocks or other materials, you can mix it in. Typically, you are mixing it in to the ground soil anyway.

Soil comes in bags, or you can have it delivered. It is labeled for pots, gardens, organic, soil enhancers, garden soil, topsoil, top dressing, mulch, and so forth. Consider the size area to figure out if you can bring home bags or need a delivery. I have found that Star Nursery, Blue Moon Nursery, and the big box stores have the largest bags. My favorite is Star Nursery. They have several convenient locations and the price is affordable. They have a variety of different dirt, and they are ready to help you with your choices.

Bring home a bag of clean sand. It comes in handy to break up clumpy soil or planting cactus and succulent plants. A bag of sand box sand works well. Grab some mulch bags as well to mix in with existing soil.

For large landscape areas such as the front yard, landscape rock is used as a top dressing. It helps keep the soil moist, free from weeds and blowing around in the wind. There are a variety of color choices as well as the size of the rocks. Assorted sizes and colors can be helpful in creating a design for interest. Larger rocks and boulders add texture. Landscape rocks in garden beds are hard to work through with planting and seasonal changes. We do not use much as a top dressing in the desert since it fades and dries out. You can find some nice textures though that provide some unique design ideas.

Natural fertilizers come from the kitchen. You have a variety of different natural fertilizers already. Hang on to coffee grounds, eggshells, banana peels, citrus peels, rice rinsing/soaking water, dry bean soaking water, any water in which you have soaked vegetables. Keep it in an empty water bottle for watering day. Keep the banana peels and citrus peels in zip lock bags in the freezer. A day ahead of watering, chop up a banana peel, place it in a liter of tap water and wait 24 hours. Make as many jugs as you have bananas. The next day, spider out the banana peels, add another liter of water and you have a very gentle and welcomed fertilizer for any plant. Do the same for citrus peels. Citrus is best for plants that enjoy acid soil. The coffee grounds can be lightly spread in planters or over the garden area. I toss my grounds out as I use them in my espresso machine every few days. Crush the eggshells, if you are not using them right away, you can freeze them or microwave them for a minute on high. This will destroy bacteria. This practice is best without the landscape rock top dressing.

When you make rice or soak beans, don't throw the water down the drain. Dump the bowl of soaking water on your outdoor plants. This is a gentle fertilizer that offers many minerals plants adore.

If you compost, you know all the benefits. There are mini composters on the market for small areas. You can keep your composter outside all year round. It is worth it if you are in the mood. It is a popular concept now with so many people investing in raised vegetable garden beds. This equipment is small and attractive. It is easy to set up and use. Self-sufficient home steads are growing in every environment. Roof top decks, patios, balconies, and other outdoor spaces no matter how small your area.

Another popular hobby is keeping a worm farm. There are several styles of ready-made kits to start a worm farm. It is like composting. You use the worm castings as natural fertilizer. I don't know what the cost difference is between buying a bag of worm casings or growing your own. I buy mine in bags from the garden center. I do buy worms for my garden every year. I pass on worm farming.

Like all regions, we fertilize spring through early fall and let plants rest in winter.





## CHAPTER 5 – PEST CONTROL

Pests that feed and live on plants are tiny. Aphids love roses and annoy all gardeners. Moths and other flying insects use the plants to host their larvae. When the larvae hatch, the plant leaves are eaten. I have not seen caterpillar infestation webs like I used to as a kid. I am sure commercial farmers have more experience. We do not have slugs or snails for the most part unless you have a pond or other water feature. We are quite lucky in the pest department.

I use the fan sprayer nozzle on my hose to spray my plants in the morning. This keeps any new pests from setting up a homestead and cleans the leaves. I have found that cleaning plants discourages pests. We get California's dirty fire ash air during fire season which covers plants with a dirty oily film. Spraying plants with hoses cleans them during this season. It is not enough to wait for the next rain shower to clean plants. We are dry and dusty which requires hose water spray for maintenance.

At the store or nursery where you are buying plants, give them a close inspection.

1. Lift the plant from the pot and check the roots. The roots should be white and healthy without any smell or signs of rot. The soil should not be soggy. Often it is watering day, and it is wet.
2. Inspect the plant at the base. Check the soil for any signs of webbing, mold, or unnatural things. Continue up the stem and leaves. Check both sides of the leaves for signs of damage, pests, discoloration, deformity of leaves, webbing, white specks, or anything moving. Wear your glasses or bring a magnifier if your eyesight is in need, these pests are micro tiny.
3. Look around at the other plants for similar symptoms. The area should be pest free. When you bring the plant home, give it a wash and lemongrass essential oil spray before planting.

I spray my flowering plants like roses, vegetables, and herbs with lemongrass essential oil. I fill a quart size sprayer with about 20 – 30 drops of oil. This discourages pests that like these tender leaves. I have never had a pest infestation. I do have monthly pest control for bugs and that may do the trick.

**BRING IN THE BIG GUNS.** For an infestation of spider mites, aphids, and other pests:

2 quarts of water

¼ cup peppermint castile soap (Dr. Woods)

¼ cup tea tree castile soap (Dr. Woods)

¼ cup eucalyptus castile soap (Dr. Woods)

1 Tablespoon hydrogen peroxide (Dr. Woods)

1 cup 70% alcohol

Mix and fill a spray bottle. Outside, generously spray your plant from top to bottom, under the leaves and on the top of the soil. Let that set for an hour or so. Rinse the plant off. Repeat in a few days if necessary. If you cannot find the soap for each of the oils, you can add about 10 drops of essential oil into ¼ cup of any flavor castile soap. If you can only find one of the 3, use that and ensure you have ¾ cup total soap. Reduce the recipe for smaller amounts as needed.

We have lizards or geckos in our gardens. I use natural pest control so that I don't disturb their environment. They eat insects and are good for our gardens. I haven't seen any dangerous spiders like black widows or brown recluses. Any other spider may be beneficial, so I don't want to harm them.

Robins, songbirds, and quail will rummage the garden soil for a meal. It's not often that I can enjoy their efforts. Quail and Robins will make a bit of a mess, but I don't mind. It's hard for them to find a garden without the landscape rock top dressing. Just leave some worms for my plants.



## CHAPTER 6 – IDENTIFY “HELP ME” SYMPTOMS

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When your plant is suffering, it will show different symptoms. It would help if they could speak. As you become a seasoned plant owner, you can feel their pain and see the smallest of changes. Plants can go through a bad patch, recover and you never know what happened. Plants can go into dormancy that looks like they are dying. There are some signs that can help you diagnose the problem. Light, soil, and water are the primary causes of plant stress.

**Yellowing leaves.** Leaves that get old can turn yellow. It is part of the aging process. These leaves will be a single leaf at the bottom part of the plant. This is normal. The plant should be pushing out new growth that replaces the ones it is discarding. If you don't see any new production, and the plant has more yellow leaves than green, it is a problem. Typically, the ratio of light to water is the culprit. Leaves that do not get sufficient light are exposed to the same amount of water as the top that is getting ample light. Plants with foliage that keep the bottom shaded will yellow and lose leaves. The other side of the ratio is too much water. Typically, you will see yellowing throughout the plant rather than just the bottom leaves. This is more prominent in pots than plants in the ground. However, you may have a low spot that collects water, or your drip system is leaking. Check out your sprinkler heads. Adding sand to soil can help with drainage.

**Dry crispy leaves and edges.** This is often underwatering for extended periods. Some plants do not like to dry out. If your plant is one that likes a light moist soil, a water meter can accurately display the hydration in the soil. Your plant may have compacted or hydrophobic soil. Tilling the soil and adding sand or other soil enhancers help both compacted and hydrophobic soil. The sun will crisp up leaves quickly. If it is a potted plant, move it. Provide sun protection if you can't move it. Remove crispy leaves to help the plant to recover. The benefit of potted plants is the ability to move them around with the movement of the sun.

**If your soil is not the issue.** Check for pests. A pest infestation will cause damage to the leaves. The pests may no longer be present, but the damage has been done. Remove the damaged leaves or trim the edges if that is possible.

**Limp dropping leaves.** This is typically a water issue. Adjust the hydration level in the soil. Protect the plant from pests and direct sunlight while it recovers. If you have just fertilized or changed fertilizers, it may be over-fertilized. Aerate the soil around to distribute any excess fertilizer. If it is a potted plant, you can flush the pot.

**Plants that do nothing.** Certain plants will go for extended periods without producing any growth or new leaves. Dormancy is usually the issue. Dormancy is a normal cycle, and the plant should wake up in 6-8 weeks or months. If a plant has not produced any new growth in years, it is not thriving. If the plant is potted, pull the plant from the pot and check the root ball and soil. Plants need adequate light, water, and soil to thrive. If any of these three elements are missing, it will choose dormancy.

Plants that are dormant in winter include Bougainvillea, lavender, pomegranate trees, trumpet vines, black eyed Susan, roses, geranium, lantana, and other perennials. Most trees except evergreen. They come back in spring. Dormancy is a time to prune, till the soil and protect them from freezing temperatures. Mostly it is the humidity in freezing temperatures that we do not get often. You can wrap the bases with burlap and other materials until spring. Small palms need to be wrapped as well. Tall cacti are wrapped as well.



## CHAPTER 7 – STYLING A GARDEN

Plant lovers enjoy the beauty and vitality of their collection. Plant collections have moved beyond a bunch of plants in the garden without any forethought.

Plant styling is the placement, pruning, shaping, and grouping of household plants. It starts with a type of plant and how you want to display the plant. Will you place it on a table, group it with other plants, grow it into a certain shape? Think of it like putting together an outfit to wear, a new hair style or room design.

Start with a decorative planter. After deciding if you are growing a tall or bushy plant, consider the shape and size of the decorative planter. Planters can be a texture, shape, color, or size. The decorative planter can define the style of the plant or tree. You can change out the planters anytime to change the mood. When a plant needs a bigger home, you can stay with the same design or change it altogether. If you redesign your room, your planters can change to create interest.

A plant stand, trellis, tall planter, raised planter bed, terraced slope and decorative supports offer design enhancements. Most planters have a more interesting appeal when elevated of the ground or flat surface. Pots on tables need a stand or lifter to protect the table and add design. Creating different heights with lifters offers a plant grouping both light requirements and appeal. You can use bricks to make assorted elevations for a display.

Shop around your house for plant styling material. Unused items stored in the garage, a box of donations, dishes, and ceramics at the back of a cabinet can offer ideas. An old fondue pot is a workable choice to lift a plant, offer a container to sit in and add interest. Turning other pots upside down for a base. Using a stack of books to lift plants to different heights. Using old serving bowls and dishes make decorative saucers. Go through your house to find the treasures you need to style your plants. Broken pots and dishes half buried in a garden are yard art.

Top dressing is especially appealing in plants. Moss, alive or dried is an interesting medium. Sand, tiny aquarium rocks, black charcoal, white rocks, decomposed granite, and marbles add interest. Mix and match the different mediums. You can easily change them if you change the decorative pot. Arrange large stones and boulders in beds for texture.

Group a variety of feathery, spikey, bushy, tall, short, and fat plants together along a patio or seating area. This is fun when you have a variety of small plants that may seem lost on their own. Use bricks, rocks, boulders, driftwood, and other items to add interest to a garden area. A dry bird bath used as a plant base adds height to a garden.

Make a stage of varying heights of slump block to display a garden of potted cacti and succulents. Paint some of the blocks to add color. Use small trailing plants in between plants for an artistic touch.

Prune to shape into Bonsai style plants. You do not need to Bonsai a plant to help it appear in a Japanese style. You can use Bonsai wire to help train regular plant branches into interesting shapes. It takes 3-6 months to create, and the wires are not very visible while training. Turning a tall leafless stem into a twisted or S shape is dramatic and does not harm the plant.

Use your imagination, check out the internet for inspiration. You will not be satisfied with the nursery pot and saucer again.

Whatever your design, plan for lighting. Up or back lighting highlights low lying foliage and creates drama. Hanging lights can highlight plants. Solar lights through out a garden. Lights strung around the seating area. Torch lights along a path. Lights around a water feature or pool are popular. Lighting will change the landscape after dark. Warm summer nights in Las Vegas are a popular time to be outside. We do not have the mosquito or flying insect problem that other regions incur on summer evenings. We have the best outdoor bug-free environment you will find.