



Top 7 Tips to Help Create a Professional Style Planting Bed

Welcome! If you're a DIY homeowner looking to create a professional-looking planting bed, this guide will walk you through 7 steps that landscape professionals use.

Whether you're starting from scratch or upgrading an existing space, following these steps will ensure your yard looks polished, balanced, and well-maintained—all while staying within budget.

👉 ****Bonus:**** At the end of this guide, you'll find common DIY mistakes to avoid

Step 1: Choose the Right Location

📍 Sun vs. Shade:

Observe how much sunlight your chosen area gets throughout the day.

Full sun (6+ hours): Best for flowers like roses, lavender, and ornamental grasses, native plants.

Partial shade (4-6 hours): Ideal for hostas, hydrangeas, and ferns.

Full shade (less than 4 hours) Use plants like astilbe, coral bells, or native woodland species.

🔧 **Tip:** Stand at your front door facing the yard and use the compass app on your phone and then take a screenshot and save it to photos so you have a reference for sun location and microclimates around your home.


Step 2: Define the Bed Shape Like a Pro

➡ Curves vs. Straight Lines:


Curved edges create a natural, flowing look—best for informal or cottage-style gardens.

Curved edges can also direct your eyes to features in the garden.

Straight edges are more modern and structured—ideal for contemporary homes. Straight edges are harder to layout and maintain.

 **Pro Tip:** Use a garden hose to lay out your bed shape before cutting the edges. This allows you to visualize the design and adjust before committing. Another option is white spray paint (although harder to adjust). You don't need a continuous line of paint simply just a dot every 5 or ten feet. Plastic bag with a corner cut out and use flour as a marker. Sometimes it is hard to get the flour to pour out evenly.

Step 3: Prepare the Soil for Long-Term Success


 Healthy soil = healthy plants!

Remove grass and weeds completely to prevent future issues.

Mix in organic compost to improve soil texture and drainage.

For clay soil, add sand and compost to loosen it up. Or simply select plants that thrive in heavy soils for long term success.

For sandy soil, add organic matter to help retain moisture. Or simply select plants that thrive in sandy soils for long term success.

 **Quick Test:** Squeeze a handful of damp soil. If it crumbles easily with your thumb, it's well-draining. If it stays in a tight ball, it needs improvement!


Step 4: Choose the Right Plants for Year-Round Interest

 The 3-Layer Approach:

1. Foundation plants (evergreens/shrubs): These provide year-round structure and protection for birds.
2. Seasonal interest plants (perennials & annual flowers): Bloom at different times.
3. Accent plants (grasses, ornamental trees): Add height and movement.
4. Water feature of some type to add sound and movement into the garden.

 **Pro Tip:** Choose native plants for low-maintenance beauty and wildlife support.


Step 5: Plant with Proper Spacing & Depth

 Planting like a pro:

Dig a hole several inches wider than the plant/root ball but no deeper.

Gently loosen roots before planting to encourage outward growth. This will remove the chance of the roots to simply grow in a ball.

Follow spacing recommendations overcrowding leads to competition and disease. THIS cannot be emphasized enough. You want to provide air movement and space for the plants to develop naturally thus minimizing the need for future characteristic pruning.

 **Pro Tip:** When planting perennials, annuals or bulbs, cut a piece of PVC or lumber to 12" or 18" or 24" length. Then you can use that to quickly layout plant material with proper spacing. I call this the Idiot Stick.....

Step 6: Edge, Mulch & Maintain for a Polished Look

 Clean Edges Make a Huge Difference:

Use a flat spade or edging tool to create a crisp border around your bed.

Maintain the edge every few months for a professional finish.

 Mulching Tips:




Apply 2-3 inches of mulch (not too thick!) to suppress weeds & retain moisture

Apply a pre-emergent to all mulch upon installation to prevent weed seeds from germinating .

NEVER USE "WEED BARRIER" AS IT PREVENTS THE MULCH FROM DECOMPOSING INTO THE SOIL AND KEEPS THE SOIL SURFACE HARD PREVENTING RAIN FROM SUCCESSFULLY MOVING INTO THE SOIL.

Keep mulch away from plant stems to prevent rot.

 Best Mulch Choices:

-  Shredded bark (natural look) (Pine or Hemlock here in the midwest)
-  Pine needles (great for acid-loving plants)
-  Stone mulch (for modern & dry landscapes)

DO NOT USE STAINED MULCH AS THE DYE CAN RAN OFF ONTO YOUR CONCRETE OR WATER GARDEN AND THE FRESHLY CHIPPED MULCH REMOVES NITROGEN FROM THE SOIL AS IT DECOMPOSES AND THIS MULCH TENDS TO FLOAT OFF DURING A HARD RAIN


Step 7: Easy Maintenance Plan for Year-Round Beauty

Weekly:


Check soil moisture (water as needed). Especially on newly installed plant material
Pull small weeds before they spread. Always easier after a rain.


Seasonal:

Trim dead leaves & flowers for a tidy look.
Apply fresh mulch each spring.
Fertilize plants 2-3 times a year with a root drench(the best alternative) or a foliar application early in the morning.


 **Pro Tip:** Use a product like Moisture Manager to reduce watering needs by 50%. I have used this product for over ten years with great success.

Bonus: Common DIY Mistakes & How to Avoid Them

 Mistake #1: Ignoring Plant Spacing → Solution: Follow recommended spacing from plant tags.

 Mistake #2: Over mulching → Solution: Stick to 2-3 inches and keep mulch off stems.

 Mistake #3: Planting Too Deep → Solution: Plant at the same depth as the nursery pot.

 Mistake #4: Choosing the Wrong Plants → Solution: Research sun/shade needs before buying. **THIS IS ACTUALLY THE NUMBER 1 MISTAKE MADE BY ALL GARDENERS....UNFORTUNATELY INCLUDING MOST PROFESSIONAL GARDENERS.**

Want more help? If you like these quick tips, you will love my in depth gardening courses and interactive zoom workshops. Be sure to visit gettingdirtywithglenn.com for complete list of courses.

About the Garden Expert:



Glenn Rieker has a degree in landscape architecture and has been a landscape contractor with 45+ years of experience designing, building and maintaining large residential and estate gardens in the Midwest and on the east coast and is now helping DIY homeowners achieve professional results while avoiding all of the common pitfalls along the way.

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