

# Bring home the right pine

I was in Midland recently and saw some beautiful pine trees. They are dark green, 35 to 40 feet tall and shaped like an oak. I called a nursery there and got two answers: Ponderosa pine or Eldarica pine. Do you know which it may be and whether it will grow in the red, sandy loam of western Denton County?

P.H., Dallas

It could be either of those, but I'm guessing it is an Italian stone pine. This is the best pine choice for North Central Texas.

I recently heard one of your radio listeners mention a plant that could be used as a substitute for sugar. What is it?

M.W., Dallas

Stevia is the herb we discussed. It is easy to grow and extremely sweet. It can be used fresh or dried, but most users cook it in a sweet liquid. Stevia is covered in my *Herbs for Texas* book.

We had maple trees cut down and ground up. The shavings sat for a few weeks, and then we spread them under our shrubs as mulch. Someone said the natural acids of the tree may kill the shrubs. Should we rake the mulch off immediately?

P.C., Dallas

Whoever told you that is goofy. Tilling fresh wood chips into the soil would tie up the nitrogen, but, used on the surface, they don't pose a problem. If you toss a little compost onto the chips, the plants will do even better.

How short should I cut Bermuda grass? I have been told to scalp it in the spring.

J.S., Dallas

## ORGANIC ANSWERS



HOWARD GARRETT  
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Scalping is a bad idea. It's hard on the lawn equipment and on you, it wastes time, it removes valuable organic material, and it exposes bare soil to sunlight and wind. This causes loss of moisture, loss of carbon and loss of beneficial living organisms. The bare soil allows weed seeds to germinate, and the loss of organic matter and microbes reduces the fertility of the soil.

Scotts is making an "organic" fertilizer that is sold at Home Depot. I left the Dallas area two years ago and have been searching for a high-quality organic fertilizer here in Mississippi. Do you know about the Scotts product?

L.H., Petal, Miss.

I'm not familiar with it, but if it is truly an organic fertilizer, it will be fine. However, the Scotts company is mainly in the chemical business.

Acceptable organic materials are listed on my Web site.

## RESOURCES

**ONLINE:** www.dirtdoctor.com for free organic-program handouts  
**RADIO:** KSKY-AM (660), Saturday 11 a.m.-noon and Sunday 8-11 a.m. www.ksky.com.

**MAIL:** P.O. Box 140650, Dallas, TX 75214

## THE WEEK

TUESDAY

### HEALTHY LIVING

**SEEING BEYOND:** These health problems are hidden in the eyes

WEDNESDAY

### TASTE

**STRONG TO THE FINISH:** Spinach soufflé shows its chops in 20 easy recipes

NEXT WEEK

### HOME

**LITTLE LANDSCAPES:** Easy-care terrariums reflect the same trends as big, outdoor gardens

## TELL US

### ABOUT YOUR TOWN:

What do you like most about where you live? And what do you find most challenging?

Is it the convenience, neighborly neighbors, architecture, activities, trees, shopping, small-town feel, the diversity?

Does the traffic drive you to distraction? Are city services, housing costs, noise levels, restaurants or schools areas of concern or points of pride?

We'd like to hear from you for a *Discover DFW* story. Please e-mail khstraach@aol.com and put "where I live" in the subject line. Please also include a phone number and the town where you live.

## HOME

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# Annuals from seed fuel the couch potato's garden

Beautiful flowers in 6 steps

By RICK ROSEN  
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Growing annual flowers from seed is the lazy way to garden. Prepare the soil, mix in a little fertilizer, sow the seeds, then water. After the flowers bloom, cut them and stick them in a vase. Enjoy a glass of iced tea.

## CHORES

OK, it's a bit more work than that. But not much.

Here are steps to beautiful annual flowers:

■ Dig 6 to 8 inches deep in a bed to loosen soil.

■ Mix in compost.

■ Mix in slow-release fertilizer.

■ Sow seeds per packet directions (in rows or free-form).

■ Cover lightly with soil.

■ Water; maintain moisture.

■ After the seeds sprout, thin the sprouts so they are spaced apart as recommended on the seed packet.

Annuals won't, of course, return each year as perennials do. But you can't beat sowing annual seeds for ease. In fact, the only easier way to grow flowers is to grow re-seeding annuals. But that's a different topic.

## WHEN TO SOW ANNUALS

### FALL-SOWN, SPRING-FLOWERING

Plant	Height (inches)	Spread (inches)	Exposure	Comments
Calendula	10-24	10-24	Sun	Tender here
Nasturtium	8-48	24	Sun, part shade	Needs good drainage
Pansy	8-10	8-10	Sun, part shade	Hardy
Dianthus or Pinks	10	8-10	Sun	Carnationlike
Larkspur	6-30	6-24	Sun	Good in mass
California poppy	12	10	Sun	Attractive cut flower
Iceland poppy	12	10	Sun	Bright colors
Snapdragon	6-36	6-24	Sun, part shade	Needs good drainage
Viola	8-10	8-12	Sun	Many colors

### SPRING-SOWN, SUMMER AND FALL-FLOWERING

Plant	Height (inches)	Spread (inches)	Exposure	Comments
Ageratum	6-20	8-20	Sun	Spider-mite problem
Alyssum	4-8	12-24	Sun, part shade	Heat-, drought-tolerant
Amaranthus	48	30	Sun	Brilliant foliage
Aster	3-8	12-36	Part shade	Attractive in mass
Begonia	6-15	8-15	Shade	Attractive flower and foliage
Baby's breath	24	24	Sun	Mass of flowers
Celosia (Cockscomb)	12-36	10-30	Sun	Crested and plum types
Cosmos	36-72	24-48	Sun	Heat-resistant; may need staking
Four-o'clock	20-36	20-36	Sun	Heat-resistant
Gaillardia	12-18	12-18	Sun	Tolerates heat, drought
Geranium	12-24	12-24	Sun, part shade	Protect from burning in summer
Globe amaranth	8-24	12-24	Sun	Attractive cut or dried
Gloriosa daisy	15-30	15-30	Sun	Heat-, drought-tolerant
Impatiens (sultana)	6-24	10-24	Shade	Brightly colored flowers
Marigold	6-36	10-36	Sun	Heat-, drought-tolerant
Morning glory	vine	vine	Sun	Rapid grower
Petunia	8-12	12-24	Sun, part shade	Heat-, drought-tolerant
Portulaca	12	12-18	Sun	Heat-tolerant
Purslane	12	12-18	Sun	Withstands heat, drought
Sunflower	36-96	36-60	Sun	Good background plant
Verbena	6-12	12-24	Sun	Withstands heat, drought
Zinnia	6-36	6-36	Sun	Withstands heat, drought

Source: Texas Cooperative Extension

# Lasagna gardening, hold the shovel

It's eco-friendly layering with no digging required

From Wire Reports

PORT ARTHUR, Texas — Liz Segler doesn't believe a gardener has to be a slave to the shovel, tiller and hoe. At the Thyme for Herbs Society's HerbFest last weekend, the 67-year-old garden enthusiast taught others how to save a lot of wear and tear on the body with lasagna gardening. No, lasagna gardening isn't growing basil, oregano, parsley and other herbs often used in making the pasta dish. It's a method of gardening that maximizes nature and minimizes effort in creating a dig-free garden.

Dig free?

"Yes," says Ms. Segler. "I don't make lasagna. I don't eat lasagna. But I grow a lasagna garden."

Ms. Segler, now retired, became interested in gardening as a stressed-out teacher and coach.

"It helped me unwind. I'd come out here and dig and talk to the plants and then I'd be ready to go in and meet my family and fix dinner."

Here's how Ms. Segler makes her garden:

■ Choose your spot and lay out the borders. You'll build the garden from level up, not down, so a border will help contain it.

■ Wet newspapers (she uses a wheelbarrow and a garden hose for this process), then layer them, at least 4 inches thick, over the ground to form the first layer. You don't need to dig up weeds or grass, just flatten them. The newspapers will block out sunlight and prevent growth.

■ Top that with 4 inches of organic matter such as decomposed grass clippings or other organic matter. (Ms. Segler uses leaves.)

■ Add about 2 inches of compost (she uses aged cow manure) or "just until you can't see the leaves."

■ Add about 3 inches of coir dust (an eco-friendly alternative to peat moss).

■ Top with more leaves (shredded leaves are best).

■ Wet everything down, cover with plastic, anchor with bricks or other heavy objects to hold in place, then sit back for six weeks or so and let nature take its course. The newspapers eventually decompose and provide a perfect home for earthworms, which help aerate and enrich the soil.

You can make as many layers as you want, with organic matter and compost topping each other. The

heavy mulching keeps weeds down, retains moisture and decomposes to enrich the garden.

The finished beds are good for vegetables, herbs, flowers or whatever suits the gardener's fancy, Ms. Segler says. You don't need to dig to plant; simply pull the layers aside to make a small hole, insert the young plant, then pull the layers back together and firm up soil to cover the roots.

"It only takes a couple of hours," says Ms. Segler. "I make my bed about four feet wide because I don't want to walk in it. I can reach across from either side."

The earth-friendly, organic lasagna gardening method is great for anyone 35 or older or with limited strength or mobility.

"No hoeing, no raking, no roto-tilling."

Jane McBride,  
Beaumont Enterprise

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