

## The Dirt on Hill Country Gardening

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*Simply Designed*

Last week we covered deer-proofed plants and deer-proofing our specimen plants that are our own favorites, but also lunchtime favorites of our 4-footed adversaries. This week, we're going to describe some basic garden design changes to consider for this time of year.

Now is a great time to redefine beds as to edging which can make them both prettier and sometimes easier to mow around. If you have some things that are outgrowing their area, you can transplant them into new areas. Some perennials can be divided, as daylilies, irises, daffodils, monkey grass, lirioppe, larger clumping grasses, and other clumping plants. Sometimes, you'll want to add some height to the back of your beds with tall plants or shrubs to hide an eyesore or simply serve as a wall that opens suddenly into a more special area as an herb garden or rose garden. Wax myrtle, Texas laurel, viburnum, upright rosemary, and Texas Sage serve this capacity very well, and these are all evergreen and produce a year-round backdrop of greenery.

Terracing from these tall shrubs, you can plant a lowers range of perennials, and add groundcover type plants to the immediate front. This produces a fairly regular arrangement of plants. Using plants of different textures and slightly different heights in the various terraces provides a more natural landscape. Mother Nature does some of this, but she also sometimes just throws caution and seeds to the wind to produce a random planting. This can also be your plan. Thus you can have a surprise around each corner or springing up out of a lower grouping. A mountain laurel can be interspersed in your medium height plants or a vitex tree or an orchid tree can be strategically place to produce interest.

Rows of plants create more maintenance, often require hedging, and don't really lend to a comfortable, natural landscape.

Factor in sun and shade requirements, drainage requirements, and water tolerance of the various plants so that they will have the best opportunity to thrive and reach their peak of performance.

**Personal Plant of the Week.** Recommended plant for this week is Beach Vitex, *Vitex rotundifolia*, This deciduous trailing perennial is very deer-resistant, does well in sun of partial shade, grows about 2' tall and can cover an 30' area. It is a beautiful cascading plant if allowed to trail over a wall or rocks. It tolerates poor soil and water conditions, has lush, bluish-green foliage, blooms profusely all summer and fall until its leaves drop with lavender-blue flowers, and is underutilized in our area.

**Questions fielded this week.** One person asked whether to keep the winter vegetables in a cold

sprouts, Swiss chard, spinach, and a few others. If you're trying to grow lettuce in the winter or other like vegetables, better use a cold frame.

The other question asked what should be added to topsoil when spreading it. It is advisable to add about ten pounds of green sand per thousand square feet. Adding ten pounds or more of lava sand per thousand square feet are very desirable. After spreading, spray with soil activator, and this will mesh the old soil to the new soil by activating the soil microbes. You can also spray with seaweed solution to add micronutrients to the soil. Then plant away!!

**Chores for this week.**

- Plant spring blooming bulbs.
- Plant cold tolerant plants and trees.
- Plant your pansies, kale, snapdragons, stock and other cold-hardy annuals.
- Take your houseplants inside since the average first frost is only a week away.
- Treat your fire ant hills with nematodes or agricultural diatomaceous earth (DE).
- Mulch your tender perennials, particularly those that you are just planting.
- Keep on composting and weeding.

We'd like to do more articles in answer to your questions. We regularly encounter people who ask for some specific, and we'd like more of you to ask us by email: [dsteiny@ktc.com](mailto:dsteiny@ktc.com) or [linda@hexco.com](mailto:linda@hexco.com).