



## Renovating Your Garden

by *Sussex County Master Gardeners*

*Linda Peters and Ana Dittel*

Do you sometimes look out your window into your yard and think this is not the way you want your garden to look? Have the weeds taken over? Have the trees grown so much that they are shading out sun-loving-plants? Or, did you lose a tree in one of the winter storms and now shade-loving plants are in full sun? Are you dreaming of a lovely place to sit and relax at the end of the day? If the answer to some or all of these



Sussex County Master Gardener  
Linda Peters Photo

**Overgrown** garden area.

questions is yes, it sounds like it is time to renovate your garden. Landscaping a garden is a process; it takes time. Our goal is to get you to think about what to consider to make your property more useful and pleasing.

To start, think about what you want. Do you want a seating and dining area? Do you need a play area? Do you want a raised bed vegetable garden? Do you want a pollinator garden? Do you want more privacy?

Decide if this is going to be a large or a small project. Be realistic. Will

### Start with a Soil Test

When preparing your garden beds do a soil test if you haven't done one in three years or if you brought in soil from another location.

The test will tell you the soil's pH with guidelines for adding amendments — lime, fertilizer, organic matter. The University of Delaware has a soil testing lab. See the University of Delaware's website for information and instructions or search online for UD soil testing.

### Basic Gardening Tips

Keep in mind some basic gardening tips when planning your project: The motto "right plant in right place" gives your plants room to grow. Make paths wide enough for comfortable passage — usually four feet. Plant for all seasons. Don't plant trees and shrubs too close to the house. And make sure you take time to enjoy the garden you are creating.

you be able to accomplish all of the work yourself or will you need a landscaper to do part or all of the job?

Think about doing a large project in phases. When looking for a landscaper, ask for recommendations from family and friends who have a garden you admire. Another resource is the Delaware Nursery and Landscaping Association (<https://dnlaonline.org>). Members are experienced professionals.

Be active in planning your renovation projects. Researching images of garden landscapes and visiting your local garden centers will also give you inspiration and help you plan your garden renovation. It is always a good idea to put things on paper (e.g., storyboard). Gardening magazines are a good source for pictures.

Online searches for “before and after” garden makeover images will give you some more ideas.

Plan out the plant selections and their placement in the



Sussex County Master Gardener Linda Peters Photo

**Relaxing** garden area.

garden. Clip pictures from the magazines and plant catalogs. Learn about sun-loving versus shade-loving plants. Plant for four season interest.

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Set a budget. Your budget should cover the cost of everything required for your garden renovation — all materials, tools, waste removal, plants, garden furniture and accessories.

Finally, prepare your garden. Decide what plant material to keep and what to move. Prune or trim plants that are going to remain in the garden. If some plants are going to remain in a different location of the garden, research the best timing and techniques for moving the plants to their new location.

Remove or suppress weeds. Laying thin cardboard or newspaper under mulch along the paths and among the trees and shrubs that are not being underplanted with annuals and perennials is a great weed suppressor.



### Questions

For questions on this subject or any gardening topic call the Master Gardener Helpline: In New Castle County, (302) 831-8862; in Kent County, (302) 730-4000; and in Sussex County, (302) 856-2585 x 535. The Master Gardeners monitor the Helpline in the winter but it may take a few days to get back to you.

For more information about Master Gardener workshops, garden helplines, presentations, becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer, or other activities, please visit these websites.

UD Website - <https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/canr/cooperative-extension/environmental-stewardship/master-gardeners/>

DSU Website- <https://cast.desu.edu/cooperative-extension/agriculture-natural-resources/delaware-master-gardeners>

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