

Saving Time in the Garden

By: Dottie Baltz

I don't know about you, but I don't have as much time to devote to gardening as I'd like. My husband and I both work full time and with all the projects we seem to have going on around the house, there is never enough time. I can't even imagine how busy we'd be if we had children at home. I can certainly understand why many people don't get into gardening until they are retired.

Save Time Weeding

The best thing I ever did to cut down on my weeding chores was to lay down newspaper underneath my mulch every spring. Depending on how much rain you get each year, lay down between 6-10 layers of black and white newspaper, wet it down with water and cover with mulch. Not only will this prevent sunlight from reaching the soil and sprouting seeds, but it blocks weeds that have already started to grow from growing any further. Overlap the newspaper a couple of inches when you lay it down and you are good to go. I save my newspapers all winter so I have a good supply once spring comes. Avoid the shiny ads as the inks may be harmful to the soil and they don't decompose as fast. I usually spend a few hours in the spring performing this task on all my hard to weed beds and I rarely have to weed them at all for the whole growing season. See more ways to win the war against weeds by reading my other article [here](#).

Save Time Watering

The best thing you can do to save time watering is to grow plants that are native to your area and that can survive without supplemental water. Of course, there will always be an exception to the rule, like that prized rose bush or a drought that might be occurring in your area. Try growing these water loving plants together so you don't have to water a large area at one time, you can just focus on one small area. To save even more time and water, install drip irrigation or soaker hoses on the beds that have the most water sensitive plants, and put them on a timer. If that's not possible, sprinklers can free up time as well since you don't have to be present to do the watering. Use sprinklers early in the morning or late in the day to help prevent evaporation during the heat of the day. Just make sure plants have time to dry off before it gets dark to help prevent disease.

Save Time Creating New Garden Beds

Save time by planning ahead. All my new beds are created using the lasagna gardening method. You may have also heard it called sheet composting in the past. Patricia Lanza came along and gave it a nifty new name and wrote a great book on the subject. There is no digging involved and no sod to remove using this method. Prepare your beds when organic material is readily available. For me, that's in the summer and fall. Mark out the new garden bed and edge it, if possible, to keep creeping weeds from getting into the garden. Lay down about 10 layers of black and white newspaper to cover the existing grass and weeds. Wet the newspapers as you go so that they don't blow away. Then start layering organic matter on top of the newspapers. You can layer them in any order you'd like, but I always like to finish the bed with a layer of compost on top and put layers of compost and/or topsoil through out the bed. Some common things to

add to your bed include, leaves, grass clippings, top soil, peat moss, pine needles and compost. Pile the bed about twice as high as the final height will need to be as the bed will settle and start decomposing over the winter months. For example, a bed that had 12” of stuff layered on top of the soil, will only be about 6” high in the spring. To get more details on how to garden this way, check out Patricia’s book [here](#).

Save Time Fertilizing

I rarely put down traditional fertilizers anymore. The main reason is that I put a layer of compost on my garden every year. Since plants use up nutrients growing every year, you need to put back some of those nutrients. Applying compost is the easiest and fastest way to do that. I usually perform this task in the spring, but it can be done anytime of year. If you need a little additional fertilizer, like in the case of a new bed that hasn’t had a lot of amending yet, I stick to a slow release organic fertilizer. They won’t burn your plants like synthetic ones can and they only need to be applied about twice a year. Espoma makes a great line of fertilizers. Plant Tone is a good all around one for the flower garden as well as the vegetable garden. If the plants need a quick pick me up, apply a water soluble fertilizer such as compost or alfalfa tea.

Other Ways to Save Time in the Garden

- If you have multiple garden tools and a large yard, store some of the hand tools in an old mailbox in case you are in the garden and have forgotten to bring them with you.
- Grow plants that don’t require a lot of pruning.
- Give plants adequate space for growing so you don’t have to prune, divide, or transplant as often.
- Grow plants with the same soil, fertilizer, and water requirements together, so you are not running all over the garden to take special care of them.
- When planting in containers, use large containers so they don’t need watering as often.
- Grouping containers together, not only creates a bigger impact, but it’s also easier to water them.
- Simplify your garden or downsize to a more manageable size.
- If you like to display garden art, use pieces that don’t require special care or that need to be brought inside for the winter.
- Edge your garden beds to keep weeds from creeping into them.
- Keep a garden journal to remind you of when to do certain chores in the garden, or to keep track of plant information all in one place. I have some garden journal templates [here](#).
- Design garden beds so it’s easier to mow around them and edge them.
- Make your own compost so you don’t have to go out and buy it. Any successful gardener knows that is all you really need to have a beautiful garden.
- Use the right tool for the job at hand. This always saves me a lot of time.