

**Low Carbon Communities Initiative**

**Networking Key Services- NKS**

**Basic Gardening Tips for Beginners**

**Choose an Idea/Type for your gardening**

The first step in starting your journey to gardening godhood is choosing what type of garden you want. Will it be a beautiful sea of colourful flowers, a glorious herb garden for the budding chef, a nutritious vegetable garden, or just hanging baskets? No matter what you choose, a good gardening tip for beginners is to always start small and slowly create your garden oasis.

Hanging baskets, in this case, is the ideal way to start your gardening journey. All you need to do is:

* Find a basket and sturdy hooks and wires. When you add all the ingredients it will start to weight a lot, so you want to use strong materials.
* Line the basket with a liner made from cardboard or with fresh moss.
* Place a saucer at the bottom of the basket or container of your choosing in order to stop water drainage.
* Chose compatible plants. If you plant to hang your basket on a sunny place, pick only sun loving flowers to plant together.
* Feed the soil within the basket with nutrients every week as they will be absorbed by the plant quite quickly. Consider using moisture controlling compost containing slow release plant foods.
* This method would last you up to six months.

**Get basic gardening tools**

Once you have a plan, you’ll need some basic gardening tools unless you intend on digging with your hands. Thankfully, gardening only requires a handful of tools. To get started, you will need:

* **The must haves.**An essential tool for every gardener is a pair of pruning scissors. You will use these to cut back plants and bushes, as well as maintain their health by cutting off dead flower heads and branches. Another useful tool to own, especially if you have larger plants, is a pair of lopping pruners. With their long handles and large blades, you will make short work of larger, well-established plants.
* **Tools for digging and raking.**In order to start planting, you will need a series of tools for digging and preparing the soil. For this, you should have at least one spade, a trowel, and a garden fork. The spade and trowel will be used to dig the holes for your plants, whereas the garden fork is incredibly useful for breaking up large clumps of soil or for removing the roots of old plants and weeds. You will also need one or two rakes – one with metal prongs and another with softer, plastic prongs. Metal rakes are great for levelling the soil and removing stones in plant beds. Plastic rakes are better suited for basic garden maintenance, such as clearing your lawn of leaves.
* **Tools for watering.**Although the UK is quite a rainy place, you will still need to water your plants. The best tools for this job are a garden hose and a watering can. Garden hoses are perfect for large tasks, such as watering trees and established plants, but the high pressure is not suitable for smaller plants and seedlings. For these more delicate plants, a watering can with a rose attachment is preferred. Your young plants will thank you for the gentle sprinkling.
* **Tools for weeding.**Since you are putting so much effort into creating your garden, the last thing you want is to allow weeds to gain a foothold. To tackle the weed menace, you will need a forked trowel and a gardening knife. These two tools will allow you to uproot any invading plants with ease.
* **Pick the right plants**

So, you’ve chosen the type of garden you’d like to grow and bought some tools. Now comes the exciting part – choosing the plants. Before you rush off to the garden centre to buy everything in sight like a complete beginner gardener, take some time to check the soil in your garden as plants can be picky about the type of soil they grow in. There are a few ways to find out what type of soil you have. You can either dig some out yourself to see if it has a sandy or clay-like texture. You could also take a peek at your neighbours’ garden to see what plants are growing well, or you can perform a soil test to find out the levels of nutrients in the soil, as well as its PH level.

Using any of the methods mentioned will give you a good idea of what plants will thrive in your garden and inform your decision of whether or not you should improve the soil.

* **Improve the soil**

Plants will always benefit from nutrient-packed soil, even if a test has declared your soil to be perfect. Improving the quality of the soil is not as difficult as you may think. The best advice for beginner gardeners is to work compost into the top 8-12 inches (20-30cm) of soil with a spade or fork. The compost will be broken down over the course of a few months, so the best time to do this is either during winter or in the beginning of spring.

Another method of improving soil quality does not require any digging but it takes longer. If time is not an issue for you and you don’t like the idea of turning a lot of soil in order to mix it with the compost, this is the option for you. First, you should mark out the area of the plant-bed and cover it in five layers of newspaper. Following this, cover the area with 2-3 inches (5-7.5cm) of compost and allow it to sit for at least 4 months. During this time, the newspaper will decompose and the nutrients from the compost will mingle with the soil below.

* **Plan, label, organise**

We are almost ready to start planting! This is the final tip for novice gardeners before getting your hands dirty and it’s quite an important one to follow if you want your garden to be successful.

* **Plan.**Figure out where each plant will go, paying particular attention to spacing. Plants need their own space (just like moody teenagers). If you place young plants too close together, their growth will be stunted, they will be more prone to diseases, or may simply die out.
* **Label.**We all have our forgetful moments. To ensure that you always know what is planted where and to be able to tell people which plant is which, take a few minutes to make some small labels and place them alongside your plants.
* **Organise.**Another great piece of garden advice for beginners is to chart the progress of your garden and keep track of where everything is planted is to start a garden scrapbook. By adding sketches, pictures, labels, and notes you can make future improvements easily as you will have a reference of how each type of plant fared in different areas of your garden.