

# The Garden Corner

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Master Gardeners of Johnson County Missouri

Believe it or not, fall will be here soon and with the cooling temperatures you may be thinking of building a new flower or vegetable bed. If a new bed is in your future, this month's article is for you.

Placement of the bed should be your first consideration. Why? The amount of sun exposure will determine what types of plants will do well in that location. A short word on shade versus sun is in order: When the plant's requirements say full sun, six hours or more is sufficient. If shade is required, this can be a little tricky – there are all sorts of shade running from full shade to partial. I've found plants requiring shade often do very well with morning sun exposure of about two hours and then shade the remainder of the day. Let experience be your guide and don't be afraid to experiment.

After the location has been determined the real work begins. Using a shovel dig the bed to a depth of at least one foot. If you're well blessed with our typical clay soil, you've got a real job ahead. Just as a side note: Clay soil gets a bad rap because it's difficult to work with; but, in actual fact, clay has all the wonderful elements (plus trace minerals) our plants need to thrive. It's just that the particles are so closely packed together the plants roots have a difficult time getting everything they need to develop. That bit of information brings us to the next step.

Amending the soil to create a more hospitable environment should be done with the assistance of some sort of soil test. The University of Missouri Extension Office has the equipment and forms to assist in performing the test or homeowner test kits are available and can be purchased at local vendors. Most of the clay soil we possess can be improved by adding lots of organic material such as: aged manure, compost, leaves and grass, peat moss, shredded wood and bark as examples. All of the beds at Hidden Harbor Park have had "contractor" sand (large particles of sand and pebbles) added which promotes the breaking up of the clay and allowing for both air and water to penetrate deep to the root zone. It's important to note that regular play sand cannot and should not be used. The small particles of play sand when mixed with clay soil will produce bricks good enough to be used to build a structure. If you decide to use the contractor grade sand, be prepared to use a lot!

Once all the amendments have been added, you're ready to mix the ingredients of your new bed – a small tiller will reduce the effort required. Once mixed, you're ready to plant.

For specific questions and/or guidance write to: 370 NW 121 Rd. Warrensburg, MO 64093 or email me at: [maandpak@embargo.com](mailto:maandpak@embargo.com). Next month we'll talk about lawn maintenance, fertilizing, weed control, over seeding, and aeration.