

## The Dos and Don'ts of a Winning Garden

We know you love your garden, and it's fun to enter a garden contest, but have you ever wondered what it takes to create a winning garden? What exactly do the judges look for?

To give you a sense of what you should and shouldn't be doing, here are a few ideas to help you in your quest for that garden gold!

**DO** read the rules and complete the entry form carefully. Incomplete or late entries will be disqualified.

**DON'T** send in more information than we ask for, such as photos or descriptions of your garden. The judges will not see them.

**DO** be patient. Keep in mind that judging takes place over a 4 - 6 week period.

**DON'T** call to enquire if and when judging will take place. To keep the contest fair to everyone, we do not give out that information.

**DO** maintain your garden over summer. Keep in mind, should your garden make it to the finals, it will be judged three times, on separate occasions.

**DON'T** be too concerned about weather damaging plants or affecting bloom times. Judges will allow for the current season's weather conditions.

**DO** keep buildings, structures and accessories in good repair.

**DON'T** leave clutter in your front yard. It spoils the overall appearance of your garden.

**DO** try to keep plantings and containers in proportion to your house. Walk across the street and view your garden from a distance. That will give you an idea of whether the scale is right.

**DON'T** think too small when planning garden beds. Make them larger than you think they should be. Small beds "disappear" visually when seen from a distance. Go bold!

**DO** keep in mind the provincial ban on herbicides and pesticides. Judges will accept some weeds in lawns so long as the lawn is generally healthy.

**DON'T** be afraid to get rid of the lawn if you wish. There's no rule that says you must have one.

**DO** prune trees and shrubs with the natural shape in mind. Prune neatly and cleanly, removing any ugly branch stubs.

**DON'T** prune everything into geometric shapes, unless you are creating topiary, or want one or two formally clipped shrubs as a feature.

**DO** use features and accessories that harmonize with the style of your garden. Japanese statuary in a cottage-style garden looks out of place.

**DON'T** overwhelm your garden with accessories. A few well-chosen, well-placed pieces will enhance your garden. Too many will detract.

**DO** try to create a natural appearance when using rocks.

**DON'T** just sit them on the soil surface or leave them sticking up like "dragon's teeth".

**DO** use plants of different heights, colours and textures to create interest. If everything is the same, nothing stands out or leads the eye around the garden.

**DON'T** neglect weeding and deadheading.

**DO** use curved lines for flower beds. It creates flow and looks more natural.

**DON'T** plant in straight lines unless you are creating a stylized, formal garden.

**DO** place plants in appropriate locations - sun lovers in sun etc. Use plants to soften or hide ugly features, and to highlight attractive ones.

**DON'T** plant a large shrub in front of a window or where it will impede a walkway or entrance.

**DO** give trees and shrubs room to grow. Space them according to their mature size, not the size they are at time of planting.

**DON'T** overplant or choose trees and shrubs that are too big for your space. They will constantly need cutting back.

**DO** dare to be different. Foliage or "green" gardens, herb gardens, wildflower gardens and "collectors" gardens are all interesting.

**DON'T** feel you have to include flowers. Foliage alone can provide a variety of colours, shapes, sizes and textures.

**DO** work towards a balance of harmony and contrasts. Place several plants of the same variety in a group to maximize impact.

**DON'T** ever display plastic or other artificial flowers or plants.

### **And finally:**

**DO** remember that there are exceptions to every rule. Sometimes, breaking the rules produces amazing results.

**DON'T** stifle your creativity to meet other peoples' expectations. Be unique - create the garden you love!