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The Overwhelming Garden: Part 1

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If you are anything like me you might, at one time or another, find yourself feeling overwhelmed with the gigantic monster that started out as a 4x4 simple garden. You might find yourself, machete in hand, hacking your way through the foliage that has overtaken your entire back yard just to get to what you think you remember is a tomato plant. If you?re accidentally stepping on tomatoes, zucchini, or a pumpkin buried in the jungle garden, then you can probably sympathize with where I have been with my garden.

But not this year! This year should be different. This year, I have taken the advice from gardening friends, articles, and books and I have come up with a strategy to ?tame? my jungle garden. I?m not making any guarantees that this will work but I?m keeping my fingers crossed.

Step 1: Determine what type of Gardener you are.

Tricky question really. Consider how much time you want to spend in the garden every week. Consider the physical requirements. Do you need to see results almost immediately without much work? Do you have any health issues that might prevent you from having to bend over or kneel down on a regular basis? Are you going to want to eat what you grow? Are you okay with dirt, bugs, and spending time outside?

Sometimes the idea of having a garden is much more appealing while it?s still in the thought stage. You can picture everything fully grown and your envious friends praising your green thumb. By the time you?ve turned your soil, made your beds or planted your rows, and you?ve started the battle of the weeds and bugs you might just throw in the towel and decide that what you need is a garden in the form of a Chia pet. Water it and in three days you?ll have a full garden. And it can even be in the shape of a presidential head (seriously, they make Chia pets in the shape of our president?s heads, just google it). Unfortunately they don?t make fully producing Chia gardens yet but there are alternatives.

As for me, gardening is my workout. Who needs the gym when you are constantly bending over, kneeling down, jumping over rows, lugging around huge baskets full of produce, and pushing a giant wheelbarrow full of compost? I love it! But it?s okay if you don?t. My garden this year covers an area of 3600+ sq ft. It will probably take more of my spare time than I actually have but for me the effort it requires is worth it.

So rate yourself first and be honest: Instant Gratification Gardener, Weekend Gardener, or Priapos, the Greek god for green thumbs.

Step 2: Design your garden BEFORE you start planting.

No matter what type of gardener you are you should always devote a little bit of time to planning your

garden. It might be as simple as a list:

Patio Garden: 2 tomato containers, 1 barrel for herbs, dwarf citrus tree

Or it might be a sheet of graph paper showing where your beds are going to be, where the drip irrigation will be running from, and a list of yummy veggies you?ll be growing. Whatever the case may be, it is well worth the time you?ll spend on it and will save you the headache of changing things mid-season because it just isn?t working right.

This one is always a little hard for me. Once things start to warm up, I just get the urge to go outside and start poking seeds in the ground. How will I remember where everything is or where I need to water? Hmm?

The best thing I found was to keep a binder. Clip interesting articles and photos during the year and put them in your garden binder. It?s similar to when you are designing and building your home. There are so many ideas out there and if you are like me, you see something and think, ?That?s it! That?s what I want my garden to look like!? and two months down the road the idea is less clear. So take photos, write down your ideas, and dream up what your ideal garden is all about. Have fun with it! Hang onto your binder and use it for notes on how your garden does during the year.

My garden design started with a list of fruits, veggies, and herbs that I wanted to attempt to grow. The list was huge! I fenced in the area in the back yard where the garden would be and I measured the area so I knew exactly what space I had to work with (approximately 95?x40?).

From there, I went back and forth. Did I want rows? Did I want beds? Did I want different little patches to mix it up? Did I want pathways? How wide? I finally decided that the best way to use my space and maintain the whole thing was to plant in beds that were 4-6 ft wide by 12-15 ft long. I figured the width was really the most important aspect since I didn?t want to have to crawl into the bed to reach plants buried in the middle. I put in a pathway right down the middle all the way to the back fence 6? wide and left about 3? in between the fences and the beds. I also left a walkway in between each bed of approx. 3?.

I took my list of plants I wanted in my garden and started mapping out where I would plant everything based on companion planting, watering requirements, and other things I had been reading about all winter. By the time I finalized my plans I had a pretty detailed map of everything, what plants needed space, which ones to keep away from other plants, and I was confident that my water system would save me hours every week of going back and forth making sure everybody got their fair share of a drink.

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