

## Right Plant--Right Spot



*Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension*

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**A** 'Knock-Out' rose blooming cheerfully in its right spot.

Part of the fun of gardening is to ferret out the exact, right location for new plants or transplants so that they will be both healthy and beautiful. Think of a beautiful, disease resistant, ever-blooming rose such as the 'Knock-out' covered with red or pink blooms under the hot Florida sun...the right place. Conversely, no amount of water or fertilizer will make a plant thrive if it is planted in the wrong spot. Imagine a delicate, red Japanese maple in that same full, scorching sun. It would shrivel up.

Whether you are caring for a single houseplant or maintaining a bed of ornamental or edible plants, the basic considerations are the same.

**Planning:** Note the existing features in your garden: see how it looks from inside the house, from the street and other vantage points. Note the sun and shade at different times of day. Consider drainage problems, poor soil, deer, a giant live oak tree etc. Analyze your garden lifestyle, e.g. think of children and entertaining. Know thyself: are you a gardener with time to deadhead and water or is low maintenance essential?

**Plant Suitability:** Ensure plants are zoned correctly for this area (zone 8b plant hardiness, zone 9 heat zone). Choose plants that can tolerate your natural environment: heavy shade, deer or other wildlife, swampy areas etc. Check pruning requirements and avoid planting any invasive plants such as Chinese Tallow Tree no matter how pretty.

**Soil:** Plant roots need to take up water, oxygen and nutrients from the soil. Try to match plants to your

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soil...more drought tolerant plants in quick draining, sandy soil and plants that don't mind wet feet in clay soil. One of the two most plant friendly things you can do to any soil is to add organic matter such as composted cow manure or mushroom compost before planting. The other is to spread organic mulch such as pine straw or chipped wood on the surface around the plants.

**Light:** Note whether plants prefer full sun, partial shade or full shade. Because Tallahassee 's summers are exceptionally hot, you may find that some sun plants grow best protected from the sun for a few afternoon hours. Also note that many plants thrive under light shade such as that provided by a high canopy; dense shade such as that in deep woods is an environment for different plants.

**Timing:** For the right spot and the right plant to make music together, timing, as well as placement, is essential. Plant, water, fertilize, prune, protect and propagate at the proper time for the plant in question.

**Living Environment:** We and our plants all live in a complex dynamic environment. Things change. Plants don't live forever. Failures occur with the best of care. But then, so do the wonderful works and inevitable surprises of nature. The right plant in the right spot, with a little help from Mother Nature, will be a true joy.

**More Information:** Utilize the many horticultural resources available to you...local nurseries and garden centers, gardening books, especially those written for the Southeast or for North Florida . Master Gardeners answer gardening questions at the Leon County Extension Center (487-3004). On the Internet you can Google your plants or go to <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>. Visit gardens to see plants thriving in perfect conditions and note what may be contributing to their success. Maclay Gardens and the Demonstration Garden at the Extension Center are good places to garner ideas and horticultural tips.

**Enjoy your plants!**

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