

How to Choose a Garden Center

If you choose wisely, you can get all of your garden and lawn needs in one, convenient stop.

In the old days, gardeners used to receive a seed catalog every January. They used these catalogs to plan their spring gardens. It was great way to pass time waiting for the snow to melt.

These days, seed catalogs have been replaced by the Internet. Gardeners around the world use the websites to plan their spring gardens every winter. They have a wide range of produce to consider.

But it is hard to touch things over the Internet, and sometimes people need expert advice. That's why gardeners visit garden centers.

With thousands of locations over the country, how do you select the right garden center?

Do the Research

Research will help you determine which garden center is best for you.

Look at the center's catalog or website. Not only should it be filled with quality products, it should also have information to help you become more successful. Staff advice should be easy to understand and apply. Remember, they are not only retailers but also experts in their field.



Quality garden centers offer hands-on training and other classes on various gardening topics.

Expertise can also be defined by media presence. The specialists at the garden center you are considering should be on the short list that the media uses.

Your friends and neighbors may have



referrals. Does someone in your social network love gardening? If so, then ask who they use.

While some garden centers stock a wide variety of brands and products, most have a few products they specialize in.

Visit the Garden Centers

Once you have researched garden centers, visit two or three locations before making a final decision.

Talk to a sales person. Think of a problem you experienced in the past and ask them for a solution. The sales people should be knowledgeable about remedies. Note his or her demeanor and attitude.

Find out how long they have been in business and more about the owner. Good centers are usually in the same place, operated by the same people for a very long time.

Take a look at the plants. Do they look healthy? Are they well-maintained? Is there a decent variety?



Typically, plants grown in green houses are better quality. After all, they are produced to be grown in your area. Plants grown locally usually have fewer diseases. A plant may not appear diseased until you take it home.

Inquire about how the plants are produced. "Open pollinated" designates a seed or plant will reproduce itself purely if a seed is properly saved from the fruit of the plant. An organic seed or plant has been produced without artificial or chemical pesticides.

Genetically modified plants are created by laboratory technology that manipulates the plant's genes. For example, instead of mixing two different kinds of corn to create one that is more resistant to diseases, they may combine genes from corn and a totally unrelated tomato plant. These modifications do not happen naturally in the breeding process.

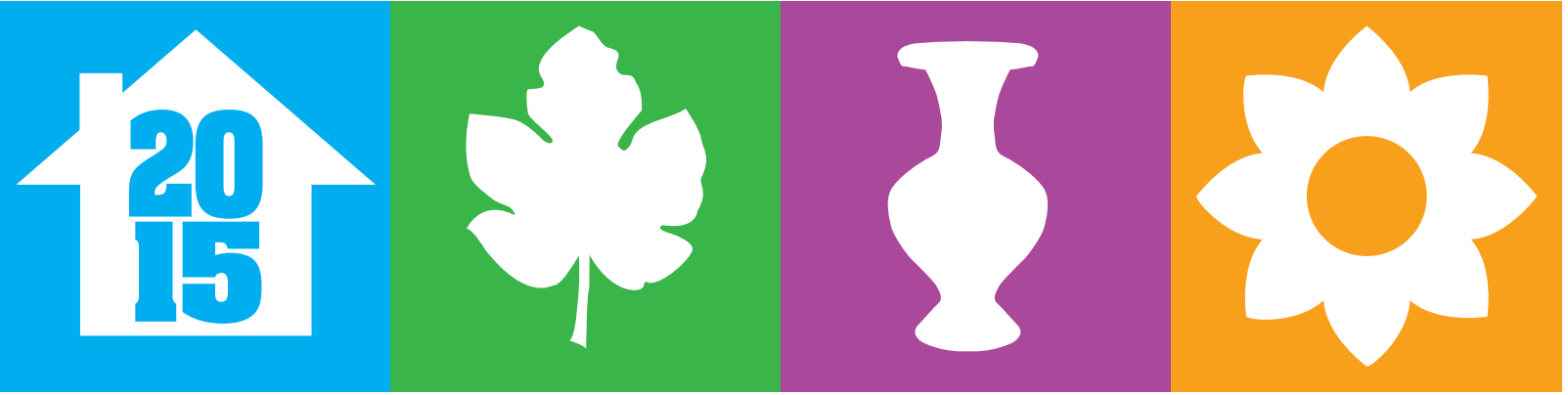


Many people may be cautious about using genetically altered seeds and plants, but there are advantages to them. On commercial farms, this type of plant has plenty of assets over organic plants. In a backyard garden, however, genetically modified plants are usually not necessary.

When shopping at a garden center, understand the types of plants they offer. There should be a labeling system in place. If not, ask the staff for more information. Commercial crops are more likely to have genetic modification.

Once you've done your research and know what you want, head on over to your local garden center and get started improving your garden.

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