Foundation Bed Planting Guidelines

Planning

Unless you have plants you absolutely love, starting from scratch may be the best choice.

Reworking soil is the key component to any planting. Regardless of soil type, adding 3 to 4 inches of compost will ensure your new plantings will thrive.

Any shrubs that you have to keep low and “meatball” (prune into geometric shapes) should be replaced with less maintenance-needy plants. Shrubs that mature to their natural shape will be the most natural-looking in the end.

Using a mix of annuals, perennials, shrubs and small trees will give the foundation bed depth and provide all season color. A mix of evergreen and deciduous shrubs makes for a more natural landscape.

Make the bed wide enough. Twelve feet out from the house will provide room for the planting to have depth.

Always plant according to the plant’s maximum size. If the plant has a height of more than 6 feet, it is not suited for a foundation planting under windows. If the spread of a plant is 4 feet, make sure to leave 4 feet on all sides to ensure it has room to grow. While this may look odd at first, it will pay off in the long run.

Many of the plants listed on these pages are cultivars of plants, meaning there may be many diverse types of plants with similar names. Make sure to check for exact names or similar plants with similar growing habits. If not, you may end up with a 10-foot plant when you wanted one only a foot-high.

Any trees used in a foundation planting should be small or under 20 feet and should be planted away from the home.

Planting

The best time to plant shrubs is in the fall. This gives the plant time to establish before the heat of summer. Perennials also thrive when planted in the fall.

Make sure to break up the root ball when planting. Remove approximately half of the nursery soil to ensure that the roots of the plant meet the native soil.

Soak the plant in water for about 5 minutes before planting. As you are backfilling the soil, add water after each layer. Plants that go in the ground with adequate water will perform better and have less transplant shock.

Make sure the top level of soil around the container plant is level with the bed where it is being planted. Planting too deep will languish and eventually suffocate the plant.

Lightly tamp soil around the plant with your hands.

For the first week water daily. After this water 3 times per week during the summer months until established.

Pollinator Foundation Bed

Planting a bed with pollinators in mind will work double time. Not only will the planting look great, but also it will provide habitat and food for the conservation of declining insects. The key to a good pollinator habitat is planting clumps of like plants together and providing food (nectar and pollen) in spring, summer and fall. Most pollinator plants need full sun.
Abelia ‘Rose Creek’
Abelia
Evergreen
White summer flowers
Height: 2-3’ | Spacing: 2’

Distylhum ‘Swing Low’
Swing Low Distylhum
Evergreen dense shrub with blue-green foliage
Height: 2-3’ | Spacing: 4’

Buddleja ‘Smndll’ Pugster Amythyst
Pugster Amythyst Dwarf Butterfly Bush
Deciduous; prune by half in late winter
Purple flowers June-September
Height: 2’ | Spacing: 2’

Muhlenbergia capillaris
Pink Muhly
Prune grass to about 8” in February
Pink flowers in fall
Height: 3’ | Spacing: 3’

Spiraea japonica ‘Ncsx1’
Double Play Candy Corn Spiraea
Hot pink flowers with golden foliage
Height: 18”-2’ | Spacing: 2’

Lomandra longifolia ‘Platinum Beauty’
Platinum Beauty Iron Grass
White variegated, evergreen grass
Height: 2’-3’ | Spacing: 3’

Tropical Foundation Bed

Planting a foundation bed with a theme can make a landscape cohesive. Many people in the Midlands of SC can grow tropical-looking plants that are reliably hardy. These landscapes are especially suited to mid-century modern homes but this design can work with almost any home.

PLANTS FOR THE BACK OF THE BED (CLOSEST TO THE HOME)

Musella lasiocarpa
Golden Lotus Banana
Yellow bloom in June but grown more for the foliage
Height: 3’-5’ | Spacing: 3’

Salvia leucantha ‘Midnight’
Mexican Bush Sage
Dark purple flowers late-summer to fall
Height: 3.5’ | Spacing: 3’

Cephalotaxus harringtonia ‘Fritz Huber’
Plum Yew
Great low-growing, dark green evergreen plant
Height: 3’ | Spacing: 4’

Hydrangea macrophylla ‘Pihmh-I’
Twist-n-shout Hydrangea
Re-blooming lace-cap hydrangea
Flowers are pink or blue depending on soil Ph
Prune in late fall or early spring
Height: 3’-5’ | Spacing: 4’

Hydrangea paniculata ‘Leep1’
White Wedding Hydrangea
Shrub is covered in white flowers in summer
Prune if needed in late summer or early spring
Height: 4’-6’ | Spacing: 4’

Illicium parviflorum ‘Florida Sunshine’
Yellow Anise Shrub
Chartreuse foliage stands out in the landscape
Height: 5’ | Spacing: 3’

Salvia greggii ‘Diane’
Autumn Sage
Purple flowers in spring and fall
Small evergreen shrub
Height: 18” | Spacing: 3’

Salvia guaranitica ‘Rhythm and Blues’
Anise-scented Sage
Cobalt flowers spring-fall
Height: 3’ | Spacing: 3’

Hibiscus moscheutos ‘Ruthib2’
Head Over Heels Passion Hibiscus
Hot pink blooms on a deep purple-leaved plant
Summer blooming
Perennial, cut back in early spring
Height: 3’ | Spacing: 4’

Carex divulsa
Grassland Sedge
Small, dark green, evergreen grass
Cut back in February if there is winter damage
Height: 12” | Spacing: 12”

Farfugium japonicum var. Giganteum
Giant Leopard Plant
Evergreen, large, tractor-seat leaves
Yellow daisy-like flowers in summer
Clean up unsightly leaves as needed
Height: 3’ | Spacing: 3’

Cycas revoluta
Sago Palm
Dark green, tropical-looking foliage
Not a true palm
Prune all leaves in late winter for a new flush of leaves
Height: 3’-8’ | Spacing: 4’

Muhlenbergia dumosa
Bamboo Muhly
Billoy grass lends a soft texture to the garden
Height: 3’-4’ | Spacing: 3’

Serenoa repens ‘Cinerea’
Silver Saw palmetto
Slow-growing, small native palm
Silvery foliage
Evergreen
Prune leaves when yellowed or brown
Height: 4’-8’ | Spacing: 5’

PLANTS FOR THE MIDDLE AND FRONT OF THE BED

Rhododendron ‘Chinzan’
Azalea
Vivid Pink, single flowers in spring
Dwarf. No pruning
Height: 2’ | Spacing: 3’

Crinum ‘Gordon Wayne’ × ‘Garden Party’
Crinum Lily
Crinums are a great addition to a tropical planting, and there are many cultivars to choose from with white, pink or red flowers. If foliage is unsightly, cut back foliage after frost
Height: 3’ | Spacing: 3’

Eucomis ‘Glow Sticks’
Pineapple Lily
Lemon-yellow flowers in summer on glaucous blue foliage
Clump forming over time
Height: 12”-18” | Spacing: 1’

Salvia greggii ‘Diane’
Autumn Sage
Purple flowers in spring and fall
Small evergreen shrub
Height: 18” | Spacing: 3’

Salvia guaranitica ‘Rhythm and Blues’
Anise-scented Sage
Cobalt flowers spring-fall
Height: 3’ | Spacing: 3’

Hibiscus moscheutos ‘Ruthib2’
Head Over Heels Passion Hibiscus
Hot pink blooms on a deep purple-leaved plant
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Carex divulsa
Grassland Sedge
Small, dark green, evergreen grass
Cut back in February if there is winter damage
Height: 12” | Spacing: 12”
Edible Foundation Bed

Don’t have room for a vegetable garden? Have more room in your front yard than the back? Maybe all your sun is in the front yard. The solution is to grow edibles mixed in among your permanent plantings. This new movement called “foodscaping” lets you use food producing plants in an ornamental setting without having to build a vegetable garden. We have grown food plants in this foundation planting to illustrate what you can do to incorporate feeding your family simply by sprucing up the front of your home.

**PLANTS FOR THE BACK OF THE BED (CLOSEST TO THE HOME)**

- **Ficus carica ‘Majoam’**
  Little Miss Figgy Fig
  A dwarf fig that works well in the front of the home
  Deciduous but interesting branching in winter
  Height: 4’-8’

- **Matteuccia struthiopteris ‘The King’**
  Ostrich Fern
  Edible fiddle heads in spring.
  Bright green vase-shaped fern
  Prefers some shade or supplemental water
  Deciduous
  Height: 3’-5’ | Spacing: 3’

- **Citrus reticulata ‘Ponkan’**
  Mandarin Orange
  Small evergreen tree for open space along a wall
  Large mandarin orange fruit
  Height: 10’-20’

- **Feijoa sellowiana ‘Tharfiona’**
  Bambino Dwarf Pineapple Guava
  Dwarf, rounded, evergreen shrub with edible fruits
  Height: 3’-4’ | Spacing: 4’

- **Hemerocallis ‘Autumn Minaret’**
  Daylily
  Edible flowers from June to September
  Height: 2’ | Spacing: 2’

- **Asparagus officinalis ‘Jersey Knight’**
  Garden Asparagus
  Edible spears after 3 years in the ground
  Spear cut April-May and then soft, ferny foliage
  Height: 3’-4’ | Spacing: 18’

- **Salvia greggii ‘Furman’s Red’**
  Autumn Sage
  Semi-evergreen foliage with dark red flowers in spring and again in fall
  Height: 2’-3’ | Spacing: 18’

- **Carex oshimensis ‘Everillo’**
  EverColor Everillo Sedge
  Golden yellow, small sedge for edges
  Height: 12” | Spacing: 12”

- **Salvia yangii ‘Denim ‘n Lace’**
  Russian Sage
  Blue flowers are edible and have a peppery flavor
  Gray-green aromatic leaves can be steeped as tea
  Needs good drainage
  Height: 2’-3’ | Spacing: 3’

- **Vaccinium corymbosum ‘Zf06-179’**
  Jellybean Blueberry
  Dwarf blueberry, large fruits, spring flower with midsummer fruits
  Deciduous
  Height: 1’-2’ | Spacing: 2’

- **Asparagus officinalis ‘Purple Passion’**
  Garden Asparagus
  Edible spears after 3 years in the ground
  Purple spears emerge for cutting April-May and then soft, ferny foliage
  Height: 3’-4’ | Spacing: 18’

- **Vaccinium virgatum ‘Premier’**
  Rabbiteye Blueberry
  Edible spears after 3 years in the ground
  Purple spears emerge for cutting April-May and then soft, ferny foliage
  Height: 3’-4’ | Spacing: 18’

- **Prunus persica ‘Desert Gold’**
  Peach
  Peaches are a great tree to espalier, or train to grow, against an open wall space.
  Height: If espaliered, height is maintained as needed

- **Pyrus pyrifolia ‘Hosui’**
  Asian Pear
  Pears are a great tree to espalier, or train to grow, against an open wall space.
  Height: If espaliered, height is maintained as needed

**PLANTS FOR THE MIDDLE OR FRONT OF THE BORDER**

- **Origanum × majoricum**
  Italian Oregano
  Tall oregano used in Italian cooking
  Evergreen in midlands climate
  Height: 1’-3’ | Spacing: 2’

- **Cymbopogon citratus**
  Lemon Grass
  Leaves and white portion of the stem used in cooking
  Lemon flavor
  Tender but usually hardy in the ground in midlands. Cut back in February if necessary
  Height: 2’-3’ | Spacing: 3’

- **Fragaria × ananassa ‘Eversweet’**
  Everbearing Strawberry
  Fruit May-frost
  Height: .5’-1’ | Spacing: 1’

**For Inspiration, please visit Riverbanks Botanical Garden**

Open daily 9am until 5pm
Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas day
1300 Botanical Parkway, Columbia, SC 29169