



Popples

There is a bright side to the rain, notwithstanding the mold. The winter rains have not only removed dust from greenery but have also penetrated the subsoil, reaching deep-growing roots; keeping plants in good condition. Plants get all their food through their roots, in liquid form only. The damage done by an interruption in watering will always be long felt. Growth slows down, flowers fail to develop and leaves gradually wilt. Don't neglect watering; it must be in sufficient quantity to be able to reach the roots. Wetting the leaves will simply not be enough. Because the rains stop between spring and winter, light, sandy soil must be watered three times a week; heavy soil, twice a week. An additional watering day is wise during the summer *hamsin* period or for continued, high tem-

peratures of over 30°C. Plants in pots or other smaller containers, exposed to full sun on these *hamsin* days, should be watered as much as twice daily. Preserving your gardens' assets through proper maintenance is the first step in achieving your slowly awakening Garden of Eden. This is accomplished via garden cosmetics, soil building, fertilizer and pest management.

Garden cosmetics include cleaning up unsightly plant parts: diseased or dried leaves and stems and any faded or half-faded flowers. On larger plants, shrubs and trees, pruning with saws and shears may be in order to remove dead and overcrowded growth (see diagram). Moreover, in cases of overgrowth and simply dreadful-looking specimens, it may be time to remove the

plants entirely and make room for a fresh start. Most important, and in many cases the simplest technique, involves rearranging plant matter within pots and smaller specimens from pot to pot within the garden.

Cosmetic care not only improves the appearance of plants and gardens, but also enables them to maintain important life processes, such as photosynthesis. It also prevents the spread of disease on dried or dead plant parts and the formation of unwanted weeds. Furthermore, continuous weeding to remove undesirable flora will prevent wild plants from covering up your cultivated ones and will also give you a sense of direction within your garden.

Finally, cosmetic care is also important for encouraging the growth of further blooms by redirecting the plant's energy into a "healing off" process and regeneration of healthy plant growth.

Assisting nature's earthworms in the art of soil building includes aerating, composting and fertilizing. Lifting and turning the soil around plants and open spaces, aside from destroying weeds, aerates the top ground layer and prevents the soil from becoming too wet and turning acidic. Moreover, it encourages appropriate bacterial growth and transfer of nutrients.

Fertilizing is the art of replenishing our soil with the necessary vitamins and minerals and other organic resources essential for plant growth. The standard Israeli way to accomplish this is through commercially available humus and compost. The better quality humus composts are completely composted; they are relatively free of seeds, which, if sprouted, create a lot of additional maintenance.

Composting, turning household

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and garden wastes (i.e., vegetable matter) into organically rich humus, is the food source and mineral and vitamin-rich growing medium for plants. To construct a compost pile: Set aside a hidden corner of the garden, not too far away from a water tap, because compost should be kept slightly moist in summer. Dig a hole about 70x70 cm wide and about half a meter deep. When the compost reaches the rim of the hole cover it with the hole's excavated soil and dig a second hole nearby. It takes about six to seven months to prepare compost this way.

Aside from assisting the quantity of soil, building soil depth is also especially important. For planting perennials and most shrubs plan on approximately 30 cm of soil depth; for trees, plan at least one meter quality soil mixed with the above mentioned humus, etc.

**Pest infestation.** "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Again, cosmetics keeps the garden clean and diminishes pest infestations. Its complementary partner is a well-composed soil, which supplies the plants with enough fuel to survive any minor or short-term pest infestation. Moreover, a little time will allow the "little buggers" to run their course before departing. If problems persist, however, for the worst and damage is either significant or promises to become so, turn first to the old-time remedies: nettle tea, soapy water or tobacco solutions. Dispensation can be achieved through a hand-held water can full of the above dilution.

For more serious but biological-safe insecticides, turn to a reliable, local nursery. As a last resort, there are always the chemical ones. You can also buy insect-repellent plantings: certain differ-

ent plants, when planted together in clusters, can serve as insect repellents; for example, roses with nasturtiums, tomatoes with dill, and marigold with garlic.

### Flower garden

In late March, many annuals can be added to the garden for a summer-long display of color. Aside from the annuals that can be sown directly into the soil, there are many others that can be planted 30-40 cm. apart from nursery transplants. Here are a number of plants to choose from:

*Ageratum Mexicannum* is most suitable for hedges. It grows 15-25 cm. high and flowers in bluish lavender. *Aster (kohavia* in Hebrew) flowers in almost every color but yellow and grows 30-40 cm. high. It is best used as a cut flower.

*Candy Tuft (Iberia)* flowers in white and pastel colors. It grows 15-30 cm. high.

*Carnation (Dianthus Caryophyllus or ziporen* in Hebrew) flowers in pink, red, yellow, orange and purple. Some species are fragrant. These flowers are charming in bouquets.

*Celosia (zriat hashu'al* in Hebrew) likes sun and produces plumes in rich red, yellow, orange and purple. It grows 40-80 cm. high. It is used as a cut flower, especially in decorative arrangements.

*Petunias* come in many colors, but mostly the red or purple varieties are seen in seed shops. This fragrant flower is suitable as a border flower or for containers and hanging baskets. They grow 20-50 cm. high and thrive in partial shade.

*Salvia Splendens (marva* in Hebrew) in scarlet, violet-blue and white, grows 20-40 cm high and has long-lasting blooms. It requires partial shade.