



How Does Your Garden Grow?

JOHN BROWN'S LOCAL HARDWARE STORE IS YOUR SPRING PROJECT DESTINATION

ENVISION NOW THE GARDEN you wish for summer and visit Ace Hardware to learn from its staff, who are all trained in the products it carries, how to make that vision a reality and position every plant, and each flower, to bloom at the desired times.

3 WAYS TO A HEALTHY GARDEN

Live plants arrive from greenhouses in Kalamazoo, Mich., to Ace Hardware, 906 S. Northwest Highway in Barrington, in late April or the first week in May, depending on the weather says John Brown, who opened Ace in November 2012 at the former site of a Fisher Nut store. "The nurseries we work with are compassionate about plants and give them a lot of care. They grow and do what they're supposed to do."

Flowers and plants grow at different rates. Pansies do well in early spring, but don't stand up to the heat in summer, whereas other varieties may

last the entire summer, he says. Do your research and time it perfectly to make sure everything blooms at different periods for an enjoyable garden all summer long.

Cultivating a healthy garden begins with the soil. Barrington is known for its tough, clay earth, but there is a solution to this problem, which is nutrient rich soil with fertilizer already mixed in it. "There are certain levels of alkaline and acidity that plants need to grow," Brown says. "Certain vegetables require more acidity and less alkaline. If acidity levels are too high, you need to balance it. When the acidity level is balanced or low, you will have less weeds and soil that permeates deeper root growth." Remember to check the soil, throughout the season, and add nutrients as needed.

Customers can pick up soil testing kits at Ace or bring a sample of their soil to the store in

springtime, when representatives from Jonathan Green products are usually there and can test it for them, as well as discuss with them what they want from their lawn and how to achieve those goals.

Find out how much water your plants need to grow. It is possible to water too much or too little, Brown says. Also, remember to put supports in place to prevent large plants from bending and breaking.

Weeds are the bully of all gardens. Unless treated with weed killer or pulled on a regular basis, weeds can put the kibosh on all of your hard work. Brown recommends placing fabric weed block between plants to prevent weeds from growing. Using mulch is another way to keep down weeds and maintain healthy soil.

Answering the call for organic gardens. Ace carries pesticide-free plants, organic soils, and seeds to grow your own fresh herbs and vegetables. For homeowners who prefer to tend a small garden, Ace carries garden boxes made of natural cedar that can be placed on a patio or anywhere in your yard.



Once your garden is set, it's time to think about the area surrounding it. Ace carries sand for resetting brick pavers, LED lightbulbs that last for 20 years and save homeowners 75 percent to 80 percent on their electricity bills, and sleek Weber charcoal and gas grills in trendy shades like blue and green, or classic stainless steel and copper. The choices don't end there. Ace sells ceramic charcoal grills by Kamado Joe and natural wood-burning grills by Traeger, along with many types of charcoal and wood pellets. Customers can also pick up propane for gas grills and exchange their old cylinders at the store for new ones, or fill it up again at the propane station. "We want to be your grilling headquarters in Barrington," Brown says. He carries a variety of innovative grilling accessories, like trays used to cook a number of s'mores at the same time and prevent chicken wings from falling between the grids.

Ace will deliver and assemble grills costing \$399 or more. For a fee, it will also deliver large orders of merchandise that doesn't fit in customers' cars. Thirsty? Relax and enjoy a drink from a Yeti insulated cup. It keeps coffee steaming hot from morning until night and cold drinks cool. Place ice cubs at the base of the cup and hours later, Brown says, the ice will still be there.

Heading indoors, Ace sells popular, award-winning brands of paint and Amy Howard refinishing products to make old furniture look new and new furniture appear old. If you're not a do-it-yourself type, check out Brown's running list of tradesmen he keeps for that purpose.

With space in the 8,000-square-foot store at a premium, Brown can order anything carried by Ace that's not on the sales floor.

After retiring from a lengthy career selling cosmetics for Estee Lauder, Brown filled a void in the marketplace and opened Ace Hardware. Barrington went without a local hardware store for seven years. Now it has a one-stop-shop to meet the specific needs of residents, a place to pick up salt for their water softeners, moving supplies, lawn and garden equipment, and advice on how to successfully complete just about any project. With the 5th anniversary of the store's grand opening approaching, Brown is grateful for the customers in his trade area who keep the business growing each year. 

Melanie Kalmar is a freelance writer, specializing in human interest and business features. When she's not writing, she enjoys spending time with her family.





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