

Cottage Garden 101

Hi friends! I'm Jean, and I am so happy you are here!

We are going to design and plant a cottage garden from start to finish in only eight weeks (or eight days if you are super excited). If you love flowers, let's be friends. We will work together to create a beautiful cottage garden, and we will have so much fun doing it! I will post pictures and how-to videos on <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61581425097327>

Follow along, and we will do this together!



A cottage garden is an informal garden where everyone feels happy and comfortable. It is a charming mixture of vintage items and romantic flowers that mix delightfully together to form a spot of tranquility. If you are inspired to create a space where you can dream and feel peace in a soothing garden that nourishes your heart and body, you are in the right place. A cottage garden is a sanctuary where we will combine things that make us feel warm and nostalgic with flowers that we fondly remember from our childhood. We will combine the beauty and scents of flowers that surround us with calm thoughts and magical moments. My cottage garden will include pink, purple, blue, yellow, and white blooms. I encourage you to pick your favorite colors to create a garden that brings you and everyone who visits it great pleasure.

It is important when planning your cottage garden to determine what USDA planting zone you are in. Enter your zip code on the official [USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map](#) website to find out what your planting zone is. My garden in Zone 8a will be perfect for plants that like full sun (receives at least 6 to 8 hours of direct, unfiltered sunlight daily, typically between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.). I would love to help you decide what plants to select if you are planting a garden in a shady area too!

Week 1 - Lay out and edge garden

Decide where you want to plant your garden. It is fine to start small if you just want to get your feet wet. You can always expand your garden when you find out how much happiness gardening gives you. You can even do a container garden if you prefer. I have selected a large area that gets

at least six hours of afternoon sun per day in the summer. My favorite way to start the design is to lay out a shape that is pleasing to me with a garden hose. Soft curves provide an informal feel, which is part of the charm of a cottage garden. One thing to keep in mind is to make sure the curves are easy to mow around by keeping the curves soft and flowing rather than lots of tiny curves that would make mowing more difficult. A clean edge between your garden and the grassy area has lots of benefits. It provides a definitive boundary between flowers and grass, which makes it way easier to keep the grass from creeping into your flower garden. The edge also makes your yard feel more loved, which I feel is super important. I highly recommend the Garden Weasel Edger-Chopper sold on Amazon for edging and will include a link at the end of our garden plan. It is very easy to use and does an excellent job for a great price. I hope you feel happy when you see your new garden starting to take shape! The edge between your cottage garden and grass can be left alone or edged with many different types of material. Some examples are below.

- Brick
- Paver
- Rock
- Stone

Week 2 - Get rid of weeds

This is not the fun part, but you will be thankful when you start out with a “clean slate.” If you start out weed free, you will enjoy your garden so much more. It will also be easier to keep up with, and it will be a lot more beautiful. There are many tools that help with the weeding process. I like to go over the whole area with a garden rake, which helps show you what needs to be pulled up. A 3-prong hand cultivator is also helpful to get the weeds up including the roots. You can dig up stubborn weeds with a small or large shovel too. There are many ways to get rid of weeds, but they will all take some effort. You can cover your garden with newspaper or cardboard to smother weeds. You can also spray herbicide, but you will still want to pull out the weeds after they die.

Week 3 - Amend soil

The importance of starting your new garden with good soil cannot be overstated. The perfect soil texture will be a loamy mixture of sand, silt, and clay with a pH between 6.5 and 7.5. You can have a soil test done to see what improvements should be made to your soil if you like. If you don't have a soil test done, you can simply add compost to your soil. You will be improving your soil no matter what kind you are starting out with. You can feel good about just doing that! We have red clay soil here in Zone 8a. There are a couple of advantages to clay. It has a high nutrient holding capacity and holds water. Unfortunately, it is almost as hard as a brick and definitely needs improving to insure healthier plants. I will be amending my cottage garden with 2-3 inches of compost, and I will be incorporating the compost into the soil to a depth of 6-8 inches. You can accomplish this by using a tiller (if you have access to one) or the old-fashioned way of

mixing the compost into your soil with a shovel, pitchfork, or garden fork. The following soil amendments are helpful to set up your garden for success.

- Compost
- Manure
- Peat moss

Week 4 - Add personality

We are getting ready to have some fun! This is one of my favorite parts of designing a cottage garden! This is something that can definitely be done over a short or a long period of time. I am always on the lookout for vintage items or things that add character and charm to my gardens. This is where your personality comes to shine by selecting things that you love looking at and items that make you smile when you see them. A cottage garden is a charming place full of unexpected treasures and romantic soft colors, sizes, textures, and shapes. I have included some ideas for you below. It is your cottage garden, and this is your chance to get creative using things that you love, some of which may hold sentimental value for you.

- Antique planter
- Arbor
- Bench
- Birdbath
- Birdhouse
- Bistro set
- Galvanized tub
- Gazing ball
- Iron gate
- Obelisk
- Solar light
- Stained glass
- Statue
- Trellis



Week 5 - Small trees and shrubs

Every cottage garden needs a foundation of small trees and shrubs in order to give it a bit of structure and four-season interest. You will not need trees if you have a very small garden. My preference is that all of my trees and shrubs will flower at some time during the year. A beautiful cottage garden is accomplished by a variety of objects of art and a wide variety of plants. I will have a beautiful redbud tree in my garden that I received as a very special gift. A dogwood tree would be a beautiful tree for a cottage garden as well. The bones of your new garden will start to form with the bushes listed below. The air will be filled with the intoxicating fragrance of roses

and lilac. The hydrangeas will form a beautiful backdrop for the perennials and annuals that we will be adding. The different colors and textures are already starting to create a relaxed garden where we can be creative because we are planting things that we love and enjoy being around. The list below will be in my cottage garden.

- Hydrangea (panicle hydrangeas for full sun)
- Lilac
- Rose

Week 6 - Perennials

We all know the value of something you plant that gets better every single year. “Sleep, creep, leap” describes the three-year growth cycle of perennials. This encourages us to be patient when we plant a new garden. The first year is spent establishing root systems. The second year features slow and steady growth. The third year brings rapid growth and makes all of our hard work and patience seem worthwhile! My cottage garden will feature pink, purple, blue, yellow, and white blooms. Cottage gardens are filled with interest because of the wide range of colors, textures, heights, and shapes of the plants that we are using. We will layer our plants from tallest in the back of our garden to shortest along the front edge. This will add the feeling of movement to our garden and create a lovely border between our garden and our grassy area. The list below will be in my cottage garden.

- Aster
- Bee balm
- Black-eyed Susan
- Coneflower
- Foxglove (biennial)
- Gaura
- Peony
- Phlox
- Lavender
- Hollyhock (biennial)
- Pink muhly grass
- Shasta daisy
- Speedwell



Week 7 - Annuals

There are so many benefits to including annuals in your cottage garden. They provide immediate color that may last from spring through fall. They offer continuous blooming for several months while adding high impact, vibrant color, and instant gratification in showstopping displays. Annuals are also wonderful to fill in spots during the time when the newly planted perennials and shrubs are not fully mature. Planting annuals will give you a garden overflowing with gorgeous

blooms instantly. Their rapid growth and the wide variety of color, texture, and size make them irresistible. Dense planting will help keep our gardens free of weeds. The list below will be in my cottage garden.

- Alyssum
- Angelonia
- Cosmos
- Gomphrena
- Petunia
- Vinca
- Zinnia



Week 8 - Mulch

The big question is whether to use mulch or pine straw. The answer is whatever you prefer and can physically handle. The important thing is to make sure you put it out 2 to 3 inches deep around your flowers and 2 to 4 inches deep around trees and shrubs. This should be deep enough to suppress weeds. Make sure to keep it a few inches away from the trunks of trees and shrubs. Pine straw excels at erosion control, is cheaper, and is great for acid-loving plants. Wood mulch offers superior weed suppression, moisture retention, soil enrichment, and a tidier look, but costs more and is harder to spread. Pine straw is generally better for slopes or acidic gardens, and wood mulch is better for beds needing dense weed and moisture barriers and for soil building.

You have created a cottage garden that will give you more and more happiness every year. Your garden will probably need a good bit of annual flowers to give your cottage garden a full look for the first year. The “sleep, creep, leap” three-year growth cycle of perennials will provide so much excitement as you see your garden become more abundant and beautiful every year. In the fall, you will definitely want to add some bulbs to your flower mix. I highly recommend daffodils, irises, and alliums because they are super easy to grow, multiply, and look gorgeous in a cottage garden. The added bonus of being deer-resistant makes them perfect choices for my yard.

My flower selections do best in full sun. If your cottage garden will be in a shady spot, I will be happy to help you select plants more suitable for shade.

Congratulations on your new cottage garden, friends!

AMAZON LINKS FOR GARDENING GOODIES

As an Amazon Associate, I earn from qualifying purchases.

Garden Weasel Edger-Chopper - My favorite tool for easy edging

<https://amzn.to/4r13pix>

3-Piece Bistro Set - Charming set for garden meals

<https://amzn.to/4qmBlzv>

Ball Regular Mouth Glass Mason Jars (Pack of 8) - My favorite way to give flowers

<https://amzn.to/4aietk6>

Solar Lanterns Outdoor Waterproof, 2 Pack - Love these

<https://amzn.to/4khmbPU>

The Start of Something Lovely - The true story of how I fell in love with flowers - My first book

<https://amzn.to/4kmwRwH>

Oki Makes a Round Trip - An Educational Journey of a Sea Turtle - My second book

<https://amzn.to/4bEwETw>