

Tom's Garden

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Ornamental Plants for Poor Soil

Depleted or sandy soil is not the best environment for growing ornamental plants. Regardless of the reason for poor soil, selecting the right plants can make a big difference. You can create colorful landscaping in the poorest of soils, from native perennials to brightly colored annuals and trendy shrubs.

There are two types of poor garden soil.

1. Misused soils were originally high quality fertile soils that have suffered from irresponsible use. These soils can be restored by introducing compost, manure and fertilizer.
2. Naturally poor soils include rocky or sandy soils that are not able to retain water or nutrients.

The soil does not always need to be improved. When creating an ornamental garden, flower bed or grouping of plants, infertile soil can be a blessing for some.



Poor soils are one of the special cases that need a special approach. It doesn't have to be an entire site but can be small zones within a larger area. It can even be a cactus planted in a container on the patio. There is no such thing as right or wrong conditions, but only drawbacks in the selection of plants.

Choosing plants that please the eye even in poor soil is not really that difficult. There are a lot of species that enjoy modest soil and are drought resistant. Choose plants that don't need excess fertilizer and watering. One fact to keep in mind is that almost all of these plants prefer full sun. Very few shade-loving plants can tolerate poor soils.

Here are some choices for beds with poor soil conditions.

*Gaillardia (Gaillardia grandiflora)



She is the main star of any grouping, blooming all summer long until frost. Gaillardia prefer dry, light soil and sandy soil. I have had them come up between rocks in the rock garden from the previous year's planting.

*Oregano (*Oregano vulgare*)

A very underestimated perennial. It is not only a medicinal and culinary plant, but can grow in any conditions, forms a dense bush which can be controlled by pruning. The flowers attract bees and other pollinators.

* All types of Mediterranean herbs

Thyme, tarragon, lavender and rosemary all love poor, dry soils.

* Sedum (*Sedum hybridum* or *album*)

Luxurious plants that prefer poor, stony, sandy soil. Some are low groundcover and some are taller with fleshy leaves and abundant flowers of different colors.

*Stellar's wormwood (*Artemisia stelleriana*)

A favorite of rocky gardens and the best accompaniment for gravel filling and is a hardy groundcover. Likes depleted, stony and sandy soil.

* Purple Mullein (*Verbascum phoeniceum*)

Grows in poor soil. About 30 inches tall with lilac colored flowers. Blooms in the first half of summer.

* Yarrow (*Achillea*)

Grows well in any soil. A wide variety of colors available. Flowers and foliage are fine for arrangements.

* Succulents (*Sempervivum* Spp)

Hen and chicks and a few other succulents are hardy in our area make a wonderful rock garden plant with absolutely no care. These are just a few ideas to get you started. There are many more choices available. Look at your favorite nursery to see what is available locally.

Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*)

Where did poinsettia come from?

The poinsettia is native to Central America, near Southern Mexico. It was introduced to the United States in 1828 and got its name from Joel Roberts Poinsett. Poinsett was the first U.S. Ambassador to Mexico with a passion for botany. Upon discovering this shrub, he became so enchanted with its bright red blooms that he sent some to his South Carolina home to be propagated.

What makes poinsettias turn red?

It's actually the plants leaves that provide its color through a process called photoperiodism. This process, in response to certain amounts of light or lack of light, turns the leaves from green to red (or other shade variations).

How to make poinsettias turn red.

In order to get a poinsettia plant to turn red, you need to eliminate its light. Flower formation is triggered by periods of darkness. During the day poinsettia plants need as much bright light as possible in order to absorb enough energy for color production. At night plants must not get any light for at least 12 hours. Therefore, it is necessary to place plants in a dark closet or cover with cardboard boxes. Don't let **any** light reach the plant. Avoid cold drafts or leaves touching a cold window. Water only when the soil dries out and don't overwater. Poinsettias need about 10 weeks of 10 to 12 hours or less of sunlight per day.

After 10 weeks you should see flower buds. When this happens you can stop the treatment and allow the plant to remain in the window.

I planted my poinsettia in the garden this summer and it grew into a 30 inch tall bush. It is now getting the dark treatment and hopefully will turn red.



Indoor Houseplants

Houseplants are the best way to add a touch of greenery in the home. Indoor plants have been proven to relieve stress and clean the air. Choosing a variety that offers a dash of colors in the foliage can make it more interesting for your rooms.

* **Lighting Requirements:**

Plants need water to survive and grow, but light is just as important. Some house plants need more light than others. Check the information of your particular plant to find the best light requirements.

* **Plant Size:**

When choosing a house plant, consider the container size. If you use a small plant container, the plant you put in it will usually remain small.

Large plants in large containers can sometimes become unruly.

* **Clear The Air:**

Indoor plants remove toxins from the air in a home, but some can be poisonous to pets. Some indoor house plants are better for air purifying than others. Your local florist can guide you in these decisions.

* **Succulents:**

Succulents are a great choice for people who don't spend a lot of time caring for indoor plants or "forget" about them from time to time. Succulents are native to arid regions of the world and store water in their leaves. They are easy to grow and can survive dry tropical or desert conditions. Home atmospheres are usually very dry in winter. Succulents also grow very well in containers.

If you don't have a sunny window, try aloe plants or snake plants. Indirect light such as a north or east facing window is perfect for them. Water only when the soil dries out.

Given the overwhelming variety of house plants available, I'm sure you can find some to match your home conditions.

Sales of potting sheds and plant sheds have increased rapidly during the pandemic. They are now sometimes referred to as "Sanity Sheds" where one can go to find solace and peace among the plants. Mark Twain did much of his writing in a potting shed.

