

CREATING A MEMORIAL GARDEN FOR AN INFANT

Creating a memorial garden after losing a pregnancy, infant or older child can be a healing activity for bereaved parents. The exertion of digging in the soil, moving stones and placing monuments provides a physical outlet for feelings of grief. Once the garden is in place, it can serve as a place to feel close to the lost child for years to come.

The following are tips for creating a memorial garden:

- 1) **Find a gardening mentor.** Many bereaved parents aren't experienced gardeners and the prospect of building a memorial garden seems daunting. Ask an older relative for help. Or contact your local [Master Gardeners](#) group or the [County Extension](#) in your area.
- 2) **Choose where the garden will be.** Ideally, you'll have a site in your own yard. However, if you're renting or planning to move soon, you may want to find a site in a location that is more permanent, such as at your own childhood home.
- 3) **Select a good site.** Most garden plants want a sunny spot. However, you may prefer to put the garden in shady corner where you feel more privacy. There are plants for both shade and sun. If you have your heart set on a certain plant, check the plant's [light requirements](#) before selecting your site.
- 4) **Consider making a "garden room."** You can use trellises, shrubs or tall grasses to create a [room](#) within your yard. This makes the space more private which is appropriate for a memorial garden.
- 5) **Include stone memorials.** You can make your own stepping stones with concrete and [stepping stone stamps](#). Or purchase a memorial stepping stones or statues.
- 6) **Add seating.** You will want to have a comfortable place to sit. Also consider adding a comfortable place to kneel, such as on soft mulch or a [steppable plant](#).
- 7) **To light or not to light?** They make solar [fairy lights](#) that would give some light to the space at night. This is nice if you'd like to visit when you're not sleeping well. Of course, there is nothing wrong with visiting the garden in the moonlight. If you think you might visit at night, include some night blooming plants (e.g. Moonflower.)
- 8) **It's okay to "go small."** There is no need to follow all of the tips. You may not have the time or resources to devote to a larger garden area. Planting a single pot of flowers may be the right memorial for you at this time.

Choosing plants:

There are many ways to choose plants for a memorial garden.

- 1) **Sentimental name:** "Forget me Nots" or "Baby's Breath."
- 2) **Match your child's name:** You may be surprised how many names you can find in the plant world. "Sweet Williams" is one example. If you like a certain type of plant, like roses, go to a website specializing in roses and search the names for your child's name.
- 3) **Family connections:** Plant flowers that remind you of your own parents/grandparents. If you can, transplant flowers from your family member's gardens to your garden.

- 4) **Choose by color:** You might want to create a pink garden for a baby girl (choose peonies, tulips, carnations, dianthus, creeping phlox) or a blue garden for a boy (allium, false blue indigo, hydrangeas, irises, woodland phlox.) Or an all white garden (daisies, white roses, moonflowers,) to symbolize innocence.
- 5) **Consider bloom time:** You will want your garden to have blooms throughout the year, but especially around the dates most significant to your child's life and loss. When you're selecting plants, go to a local garden center to ask about plants that will be blooming during the most special dates for you.
- 6) **Plant hardy plants.** While it's tempting to add flowers that aren't common in your area, you want to be sure that most of your plants thrive in your climate and soil type. The last thing you want is a garden that is hard to maintain or unsuccessful. When you're purchasing plants, shop "local" rather than big box stores. Tell them about your project. Ask for hardy plants that will be very likely to come back each year. To help with that, you need to:
 - a) *Know your zone.* Check out the [USDA Hardiness Zone](#). When you buy perennial plants (plants that come back every year) you'll want plants that are hardy at least to your zone. To be on the safe side, it's nice if the plant is hardy a few zones beyond your own.
 - b) *Consider self-seeding plants.* [Self-seeding plants](#) only live a year but leave behind seed to grow a new crop the next year. Forget-me-nots are self-seeding. As are cosmos (which come in pretty shades of pink), blue flax, zinnia, and balsam.
 - c) *Use bulbs for early color.* Bulbs are some of the earliest blooming plants, which is especially important if you want flowers in your garden in late winter (February/March.) Early blooming bulbs include: snowdrops, crocus, glory of the snow and siberian squill. Daffodils bloom early as well. You can find them in their classic, cheery yellow but they also come in a wide array of colors now.
 - d) *Xeriscape:* xeriscaping refers to picking plants that are adapted to the water needs of your area. Your local garden center can help you choose plants that will thrive without a lot of extra attention. These may be native plants or just plants with similar water needs as native plants. Local examples: Russian sage, catmint, tickseed coreopsis, blue false indigo.
 - e) *Choose the classics:* Many kinds of lilies are extremely hardy here in Kansas. Peonies, which are gorgeous flowers, can live for decades in our area. Irises are another very hardy plant here.
- 7) **Be patient, with yourself and with your garden.** Gardens take time to grow, just like people. Enduring a loss is an agonizing process. At times, you will feel so lost that you may be afraid that you will never find yourself again. Step by step, your garden will grow, and so will you. Each year, your garden will change. You'll never be the person you were before the loss, but you can be a new version of yourself.

The glory of gardening: hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature. To nurture a garden is to feed not just the body, but the soul. Alfred Austin (1835 - 1913)