



# Patriotic Gardens: How to Plant a Red, White, and Blue Garden

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## A Statewide Garden Theme

Virginia Cooperative Extension developed five America's Anniversary Garden™ publications in 2007 to help individuals, communities, and groups mark America's 400th Anniversary with a signature garden planting. The signature gardens have red, white, and blue color schemes. In 2026, the publications were reviewed and revised to help individuals, communities, and groups mark America's Semiquincentennial. These publications are useful for creating patriotic-themed gardens.

## Garden Design

This publication features two designs, one for a 30-inch-wide container and one for an 8-foot-by-10-foot landscape area. Both are for full-sun locations that receive at least 6 hours of direct sunlight each day. The selected plants - annuals, perennials, shrubs, and trees - all have at least one red, white, or blue feature. If these plants are unavailable or inappropriate for your area, use substitutions from the plant selection charts included within, or suggestions from your local garden retailer or Extension agent. Always select plants that are well-adapted to the conditions at each planting site.

The letters on the designs correspond to the codes on the suggested plants list on page 5. Use the table to identify substitute plants as needed due to availability or personal preference.

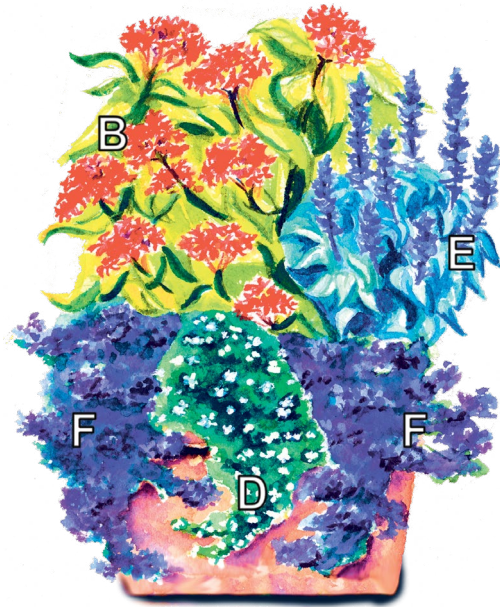


Figure 1. A design for a 30-inch-wide container located in full sun. It is an example of a red, white, and blue combination of easy-care annuals used to create a patriotic patio garden.

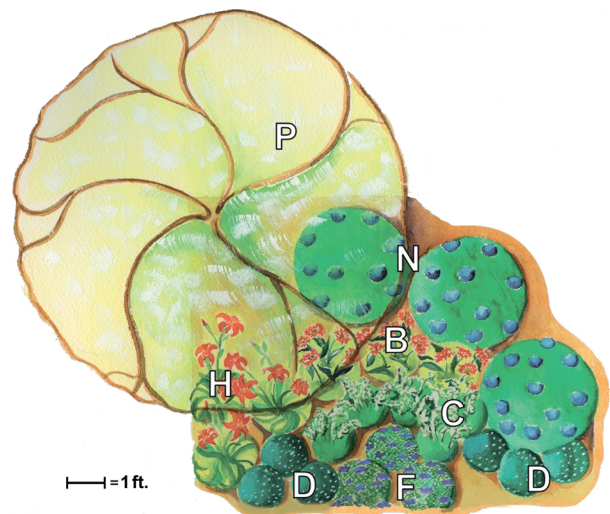


Figure 2. A patriotic garden design for a full-sun, 8-foot-by-10-foot garden bed or landscape area using a small tree, shrubs, perennials, and annuals. Each has at least one red, white, or blue feature.

# Soil Preparation

Proper soil preparation is essential for the establishment and good growth of landscape plants.

**Test soil drainage before planting.** Dig a 12-inch deep test hole and fill it with water. If drainage is less than 1 inch per hour, relocate or raise the planting area, or install drainage practices to carry water away from the planting area.

**Examine the soil for compaction before planting.** If the soil is slightly compacted, use a garden fork (for small areas) or a core aerator to create holes for air and water, then top-dress with compost. If the soil is highly compacted, spread a 1–2-inch layer of compost and use a rototiller to till 8- 12 inches deep to incorporate the compost and break up the compacted soil.

**Test the soil.** Once the soil drains well and is not compacted, test it to determine whether the pH should be adjusted or if any nutrients should be added. To obtain a soil test kit, contact your local Virginia Cooperative Extension office. A complete list of VCE offices is available on the [Virginia Cooperative Extension Website](http://www.ext.vt.edu) (ext.vt.edu).

**Do not amend the soil that will be used to backfill** around the root balls of your plants. Using amended backfill soil can lead to water movement problems, leaving plant roots too wet or too dry.

## Planting Tips for Annuals and Perennials

- Annuals and perennials grow best when the planting site has been well prepared before planting. Perennials like woody shrubs will be in the same spot for several years, so bed preparation is more important than with annuals alone. Amend the soil to address drainage issues and adjust acidity or alkalinity. Incorporate several inches of compost or other organic matter to improve soil structure if needed.
- Gradually acclimate greenhouse-grown plants by placing the pots outdoors in a spot sheltered from strong winds and direct sun. Water them as needed and increase their sun exposure daily. Protect them from frost.
- Before planting, water the plants well. To reduce plant stress, plant in the late afternoon or on a cloudy day.
- Remove a plant from its container by gently knocking on the bottom of the inverted pot. Do not pull on the stems, as this may damage the plant.
- Gently pull the surface roots away from the bottom of the root-ball to reduce root circling. If a root ball is very compacted, make a few shallow cuts through the roots on the side and bottom of the root ball.
- Water new plants thoroughly with a water-soluble plant food, or after applying a season-long, controlled-release fertilizer.

Plant at the same depth as the plant was grown in the pot, in a hole dug three times the width of the pot and as deep as the pot.

To improve flowering, deadhead (remove old flowers from) most annuals and perennials regularly.

Mulch well to keep the roots cool and the soil moist.

Backfill the hole carefully and evenly to avoid large air pockets.

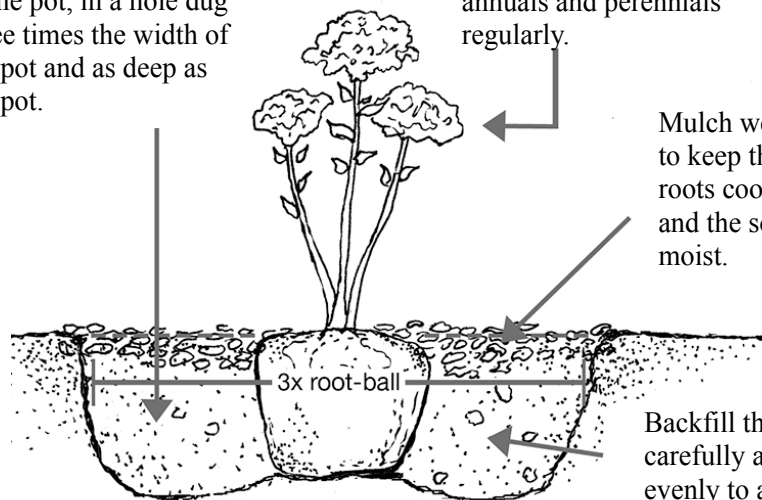


Figure 3: Annual or perennial planting guide.

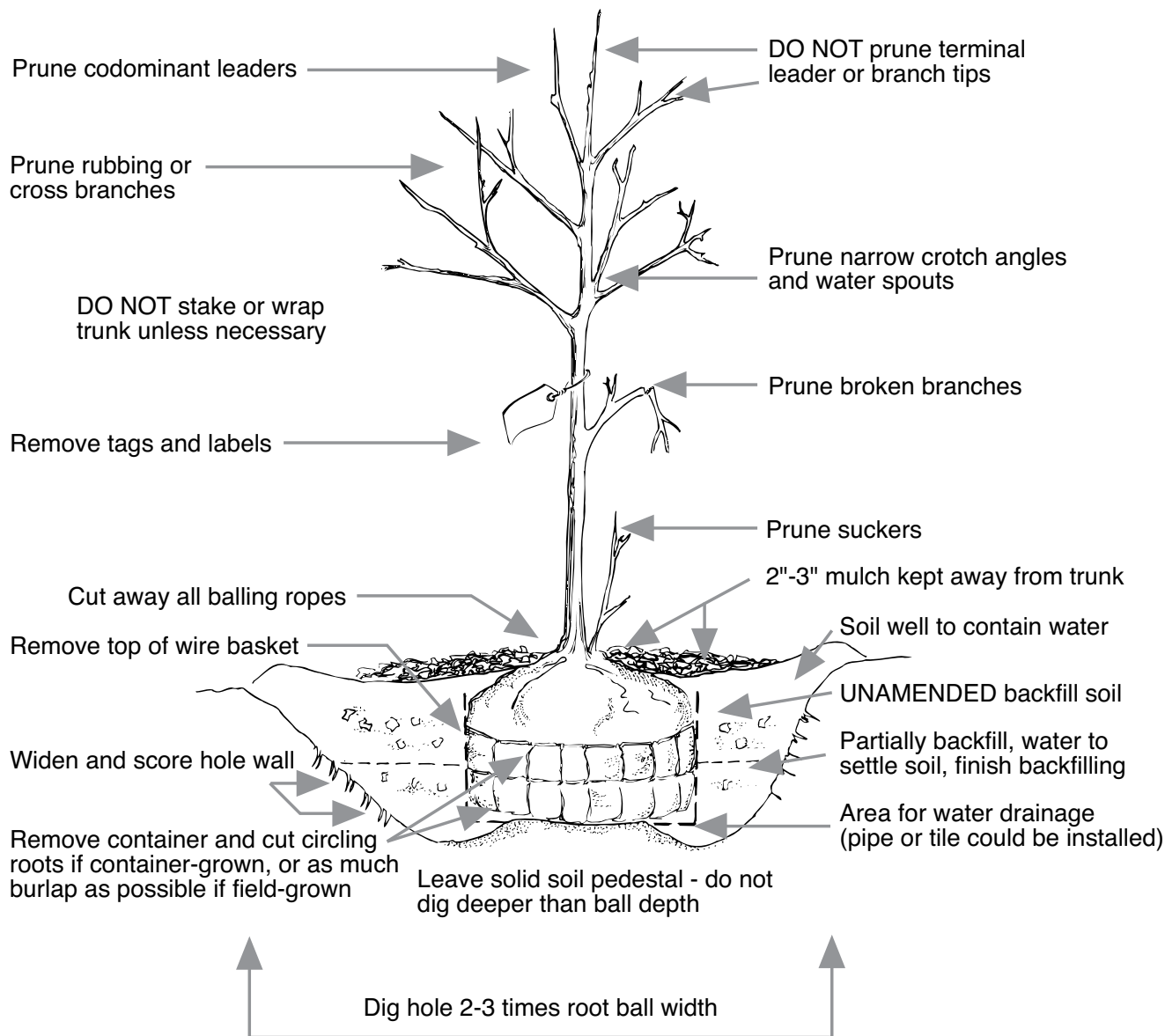


Figure 4: Tree Planting Guide

## Watering and Mulching

Watering is important for settling the soil at planting, encouraging root growth into the landscape soil, and sustaining plants once they are established.

**During the growing season, plants need an average of 1 inch of water per week.** If rainfall is limited, supplement with irrigation. Even during the winter, it may be important to water perennials, shrubs, and trees if the ground is frozen, yet the air temperature is warm. Use irrigation methods such as drip irrigation, watering bags or diapers, or soil donuts/wells around the root ball to conserve water, prevent soil erosion, and target water application. Overwatering wastes water, may weaken roots and lead to root decay, and encourages undesirable weed growth.

Mulch benefits newly planted trees, shrubs, perennials, and annuals by conserving soil moisture, moderating soil temperature, and suppressing competing grass and weeds. Apply mulch immediately after watering newly installed plants. **Do not over-mulch! Two to three inches is adequate**, less if you are using a fine material, more if it is coarse. Use organic mulches like pine bark nuggets, shredded hardwood, pine straw, or shredded leaves. To prevent insect, disease, and rodent problems, keep mulch from touching tree trunks and shrub stems. Do not use black plastic beneath mulch around trees and shrubs because it blocks air and water exchange.

## Other Publications in the Series

[Patriotic Gardens: Developing A Statewide Corridor and Entrance Enhancement Program, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-211](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-211/426-211.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-211/426-211.html)

[Patriotic Gardens: Bulbs for a Red, White, and Blue Spring Garden, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-220](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-220/426-220.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-220/426-220.html)

[Patriotic Gardens: Native Plants, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-223](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-223/426-223.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-223/426-223.html)

[Patriotic Gardens: Red, White, and Blue in Fall and Winter Gardens, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-228](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-228/426-228.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-228/426-228.html)

## Additional Resources

[Annuals: Culture and Maintenance, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-200](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-200/426-200.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-200/426-200.html)

[Perennials: Culture, Maintenance and Propagation, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-203](https://ext.vt.edu/426/426-203/426-203.html), (ext.vt.edu/426/426-203/426-203.html)

[Tree and Shrub Planting Guidelines, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 430-295](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-295/430-295.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-295/430-295.html)

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Table 1: Suggested Annual Plant Selections for Patriotic Gardens. All suggestions will grow in full sun to part shade/ part sun.

Code	Common Name	Botanical name (suggested cultivars; ask your retailer for local suggestions)	Height and Spread	Dry or Wet Soils Type	Flower Color
A	lantana	<i>Lantana</i> 'Patriot Classic™', 'Cherry Bloomify™ Red', 'Luscious® Royale Red Zone™', 'Dallas Red', 'Red Spread'	16"; 30"	d-m	red
B	pentas	<i>Pentas lanceolata</i> (numerous reds and whites)	12" -24"; 12" -24"	d-m	red, white
C	angelonia	<i>Angelonia</i> 'Angelface® White', 'Archangel™ White', 'Serena® White', 'AngelMist® Spreading White'	12" -18"; 12" -14"	d-m	white
D	bacopa	<i>Sutera cordata</i> 'MegaCopa™ White', 'Calypso Jumbo White', 'Snowstorm®', Giant, 'Snowflake®', 'Betty® White'	3"-8"; 20"-30"	m	white
E	salvia	<i>Salvia farinacea</i> 'Victoria Blue', 'Blue Bedder'b 'Henry Duelberg', 'Cathedral™ Deep Blue', 'Unplugged® So Blue'	18"-20"; 24"-48"	m	blue
F	verbena	<i>Verbena x hybrida</i> "Blue Princess', 'Lanai® Blue', 'Superbena® Dark Blue', 'Superbena® Large Lilac Blue'	12"; 12"	m	blue

<sup>1</sup>Dry or Wet soils type: w= prefers wetter soil m=prefers evenly moist soil d=somewhat dry/drought tolerant.

Table 2: Suggested Perennial Plant Selections for Patriotic Gardens. All suggestions will grow in full sun to part shade/part sun.

Code	Common Name	Botanical Name (suggested cultivars; ask your retailer for local suggestions)	Height and Spread	Dry or Wet Soils Type <sup>1</sup>	Flower Color
G	yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i> 'Red Velvet', 'Red Beauty', 'New Vintage Red'	24'-30"; 18" -24"	m-d	red
H	daylily	<i>Hemerocallis</i> 'Frankly Scarlet', 'Red Hot Returns', 'Red Volunteer', 'Passion for Red', 'Velvet Red', 'Red Rum', 'Red Magic'	24" -30"; 18" -24"	w-d	red
I	shasta daisy	<i>Leucanthemum x superbum</i> 'Snowcap', 'Becky', 'Snow Lady', 'Alaska', 'Ice Star'	10" -14"; 12" -18"	m	white
J	speedwell	<i>Veronica</i> 'Icicle', 'Magic Show®', 'White Wands'	18" -24"; 18" -24"	m	white
K	cranesbill	<i>Geranium</i> 'Rozanne', 'Johnson's Blue'	18" -20"; 18" -24"	m	blue
L	speedwell	<i>Veronica spicata</i> 'Royal Candles', 'Sunny Border Blue', 'Goodness Grows', 'Moody Blues'	12" -15"; 12" -18"	m	blue

<sup>1</sup>Dry or Wet soils type: w= prefers wetter soil m=prefers evenly moist soil d=somewhat dry/drought tolerant

Table 3: Suggested Shrubs Plant Selections for Patriotic Gardens.

Code	Common Name	Botanical name (suggested cultivars; ask your retailer for local suggestions)	Height and Spread	Sun or Shade	Dry or Wet soils type <sup>1</sup>	Color
M	redtwig dogwood (redosier dogwood) <sup>2</sup>	<i>Cornus sericea</i> 'Arctic Fire', 'Cardinal', 'Kelsey'	4'-8'; 4'-10'	Full sun to part shade/ part sun	w-d	white flowers, blue or white fruit, red winter stems
N	bigleaf hydrangea	<i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i> 'Nikko Blue', 'Endless Summer®', 'Let's Dance® Blue Jangles', 'Blue Wave', 'Cityline Rio'	3'-6'; 3'-8'	Part shade/ part sun to full sun	m-w	cultivars are available with white, blue, or red flowers
O	Virginia Sweetspire <sup>2</sup>	<i>Itea virginica</i> 'Henry's Garnet', 'Little Henry', 'Merlot', 'Scentlandia', 'Fizzy Mizzy', 'Longspire'	4'-6'; 3'-4'	Part shade/ part sun to full sun	w-d	white flowers, red fall leaf color

<sup>1</sup>Dry or Wet soils type: w= prefers wetter soil m=prefers evenly moist soil d=somewhat dry/drought tolerant.

<sup>2</sup>Virginia native plant.

Table 4: Suggested Small Tree Plant Selections for Patriotic Gardens.

Code	Common Name	Botanical name (suggested cultivars; ask your retailer for local suggestions)	Height and Spread	Sun or Shade	Dry or Wet Soils Type <sup>1</sup>	Color
P	fringetree <sup>2</sup>	Chionanthus virginicus	12'-20'; 12'-20'	Full sun to part shade/ part sun.	w-m	white flowers, blue fruit
Q	dogwood <sup>2</sup>	Cornus florida	15'-30'; 15'-30'	Part shade/ part sun to full sun.	m	white flowers, red fruit, red fall leaf color

<sup>1</sup>Dry or Wet soils type: w= prefers wetter soil m=prefers evenly moist soil d=somewhat dry/drought tolerant.

<sup>2</sup>Virginia native plant.

**Disclaimer:** Commercial products, plants, and planting techniques are named and described in this publication for informational purposes only. Virginia Cooperative Extension does not endorse these products, plants, or techniques and does not intend to discriminate against other products, plants, or techniques that may also be suitable.

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