

My Top 10 Tips:

1. **Observe, learn and read.**

Establish your [plant hardiness zone](#), how many hours of sunlight the garden gets, type of soil, etc. Meet other gardeners. I recommend starting a garden journal or scrapbook or folder where you can save photos of favourite flowers or articles – or, if you’ve ever filled out a questionnaire called “*Do I have OCD?*”, you’ll want to consider a well-planned excel sheet – I have samples:).

2. **Any plan, even a bad plan is better than no plan at all.**

That cute shrub full of pretty flowers may eventually grow to 15 feet, blocking the view from your window and smother the plants around it.

3. **Know the difference between feature (e.g. roses), filler (e.g. hydrangeas) and anchor plants (e.g. boxwood).**

P.S. I assume, by this point, you know the difference between annuals and perennials. If not, go back to tip # 1.

4. **Discover your desired garden style.**

Is it classic & structured, Mediterranean, wildlife, filled with native plants, or a rambling, romantic cottage garden? Do you want to incorporate fruits and vegetables too? Do you have a colour scheme in mind?



My garden style



If I lived in a warmer climate, this is the style I really love (not altogether out of the realm of possibility given global warming)

5. **Know your budget** and apply it wisely.
6. **Know your time availability.** (I confess I don't follow this tip personally). Note that annuals may seem easy and promise lots of colour, but that's it, you'll have to spend the same work and money planting them every year; perennials on the other hand, once planted in a happy site, will return better and better, year after year.
7. **Plan for season-long bloom.**
Here's the kicker: the most inspiring time to shop is springtime when spring flowers are featured. Most of us--yes, I fell for this too--are easily wooed by this.
8. **Ask for help and consider paying for it.**
Experienced landscapers can save you money (re. tip 5).
Personal example: I planted 3 expensive lavenders in my first newly planned garden bed & I was planning on adding 3 rose bushes. An experienced landscaper took one look at the bed, gazed down the street and back, then advised me to move the lavender and replace them with Russian Sage. He explained how the snowplow would go down the street and return with snow in its bucket where it would likely dump heavy snow and kill the lavender. Russian sage and Nova Scotia's wild roses were virtually indestructible, thus a better option.
9. **Start small** (not really great at following this tip either).
The home we moved to already had about 8 gardening beds and it took me more than a year to figure out what the heck was in there, what was a weed and what wasn't. In that year, I focused

on a few main beds and left the other ones to pretty much fend for themselves. By the end of that year, I had a list of plants that were either unhappy where they were, or I was unhappy with where they were. Those I moved! Then, I added 1 bed in year 2, 2 more beds this fall and started working on one of the side woodland areas.

Bed I added in year two (to reduce weeds I used black plastic edging in early spring which I removed later):



Bed I added when the blooms came:



10. **...About WEEDS!**

No list of gardening tips is complete without mentioning weeds. So, here's the rub: either learn to love them, or start hoarding newspapers, flyers & mulch – that's right, you heard me...I discovered I could either spend 2 hours every morning 7 days a week trying to eradicate the buggers, or I could put layers of wet newspapers down between my perennials, cover them with mulch and like the wave of a magic wand, ALACAZAM- weeds begone! They still creep out at the edges, but there's WAY, WAY less to deal with.

