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GROW

Gardens too easy to fail

Boxes contain plants, design plans

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The Denver Post

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© High Country Gardens

Salvia nemorosa (May Night)

The plants you scattered around that hot, dry patch of property died two summers ago. Last year you filled the space with random things you picked up at the garden center. Some did OK. Others struggled. Either way, it looked bad.

This year, consider working with professionals.

Buy a preplanned garden.

"You get a small garden to start on your own and see how it goes," said Jeff Woodward, water division director for the Center for Resource Conservation in Boulder.

The center sells water-wise "gardens in a box" to residents in select Front Range cities. "A lot of it is trial and error — figuring out what works and what doesn't."

One of the advantages of the preplanned garden, though, is it should



Nepeta faassenii (Select Blue) (The Denver Post)

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Centranthus ruber "Coccineus"
(Jupiter's Beard) (The Denver Post)

cut back on the "error" part of the equation.

The plants, all of them geared for Colorado's arid, hot summers, are selected by horticultural experts, and the plans for how to arrange them come courtesy of professional landscape designers.

No longer do you need to wonder where to put the Russian sage. With a preplanned garden, the important things are taken into account: How will it all look? Are the plants compatible? Do they have similar water and sun needs?

"It's like painting by numbers out in the garden," said David Salman, president and chief horticulturist of High Country Gardens in Santa Fe. "It comes with a diagram and shows you the spacing and placement of the plants so you create the correct look and feel of the garden. That is important. The plants all work together in terms of color and culture, but you need that last critical ingredient: how to artfully arrange them in their bed."

High Country Gardens offers about a dozen garden choices.

The conservation center's three preplanned gardens range from \$65 to \$110, and cover roughly 100 square feet. People who order the gardens receive 30 and 35 plants in small pots, and plans for how to arrange them, plant them and care for them.

For now, only residents of Westminster, Boulder, Golden, Longmont and Loveland can take advantage of the program. Those cities' governments hired the center to develop the gardens. The aim: water conservation.

The program "makes Xeriscaping really, really easy for people," Woodward said.

Different gardens go after different effects.

That miserable strip between your sidewalk and the road? You can buy the Center's "Heavenly Hell" garden, a long rectangle of Rocky Mountain penstemon, hardy yellow ice plants, lavender cotton, and hens and chicks.

Looking for color? The "Sunset" garden's Himalayan border jewel, irises, prairie coneflower and double bubble- mint offer vibrant oranges, reds and more.



Achillea "Moonshine"
(MoonshineYarrow) (The Denver Post)

Vegetables and herbs make up most of the "Personal Farmer's Market."

If you don't live in one of the towns that participates in the center's program, there are other options. One of the easiest: going online.

High Country Gardens has one of the more established preplanned-gardens programs in the country. The retailer started selling the gardens in 1993, and they are more popular every year.

"I've had landscape designers buy these gardens, as well as beginning gardeners who want a professional look to their garden, and they don't want to make any big mistakes right off the mark," said Salman.

The "Jumbo Waterwise Garden," he said, has been especially popular.

"It's brilliant in its simplicity,"

Salman said. "It has five plants, they all are long blooming, the color combination is arresting, and they all are easy to grow xeric plants. It's been our best seller since its introduction" 15 years ago.

The company ships a box of plants and plans, and all of their offerings are meant for the intermountain West, including Colorado. They cover from 50 to 100 square feet, depending on the garden, and range from \$54 to more than \$200.

The price differences, he said, reflect the number of plants that come



Coreopsis grandiflora "Sunray"
("Sunray" Tickseed) (The Denver Post)

athlete, dead at 89

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with the kit.

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Artemisia (Powis Castle) (The Denver Post)

Packages from the professionals

Two resources to take some of the trial and error out of gardening.

Center for Resource Conservation

The Center for Resource Conservation's gardens are sold out in some cities, but the organization is generous with its plans for displays designed by such experts as Grow columnist Marcia Tatroe. Take a peek or find out if you can still buy the gardens at conservationcenter.org/w_Garden-in-a-box.html

High Country Gardens

High Country Gardens' online and paper catalogs are always an inspirational browse. When you're ready to take the plunge — perhaps the Xeric Aroma garden designed by northern Colorado gardeners Scott and Lauren Ogden — the plants will be shipped at the appropriate planting time for our zone.

Check the plans and plant lists at highcountrygardens.com

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