

10 Ways to Get Free Plants



Get free plants and save money on your favorite pastime.

While gardening is one of the largest hobbies in the US, how expensive a hobby depends a lot on how you approach it. It can be quite an expensive hobby when you purchase everything retail. However, it can also be an extremely frugal hobby for those who put a little extra time and creativity into how they get their gardens started.

In fact, it is quite possible to get an entire garden of plants for free. It's a challenge that I succeeded in doing in the past. Below you'll find ten ways that I was able to accomplish growing my garden for free.

How to Get Free Plants

Free plants? Sounds like it's too good to be true!

It's actually way easier than you'd think to source plants for free. Here are 10 ways to get free plants for your garden.

Craigslist and Other Online Marketplaces

Post a wanted ad on Craigslist, asking for free plants. Most gardeners love to help others out when they have excess in their own garden. (If you have some plants already, this is a great place to offer to trade plants). Another free site you can request free plants is on FreeCycle. You can also browse online marketplaces to find people who are giving their plants away for free. I often find local sellers giving away houseplants, cuttings, and perennials on the Facebook Marketplace. Something else you might find on these sites is free dirt. When people do any kind of landscaping or construction, there's often a lot of digging going on. They're left with a pile of dirt and nowhere to put it. Usually, as long as you have a way to pick up the extra soil, it's all yours!

Nursery

While you wouldn't typically think about getting free plants at a nursery, they can be an excellent place to get them. Always take the time to ask if the nursery has any plants that they're going to be tossing? A part of the business is that sad-looking plants don't sell well and they need to get rid of them somehow. That often means throwing them out. When you pick up free plants this way, they won't look very good the first year, but with some TLC many can make a wonderful come back and look great for years to come.

Landscaping Crews

Another great place to get free plants is from landscaping crews. If you see a landscaping crew working on a job where they are replacing displays, be sure to stop and ask what they are going to do with the plants they are taking out. Often times the plants being replaced are going to be thrown out or composted. It doesn't hurt to ask, and more often than not you'll come away with a large number of plants.

One note with this approach is that you'd better be prepared for them to "gift" you with everything they were going to compost. You will want to travel with a kit for these situations in your vehicle which includes empty boxes, buckets, trash bags, garden gloves, etc. This approach is especially effective in civic gardens or at large commercial jobs.

Yellow Pages

Not having luck in finding landscapers on the road? Another effective approach is to open up the yellow pages and get on the phone. Call all the local landscapers and gardeners listed. Ask what they do with plants they remove from jobs. If they give you any indication that they toss those plants, offer to go pick up the garbage-bound plants. You'll save them

the money it would normally cost in disposal fees.

Friends and Family

If you have friends that also garden, then you have a treasure trove of free plants waiting for you. Tell all your friends you're interested in adding to your garden and you'd be happy to help them divide their perennials, especially if they will share new starts with you.

Strangers

Heck, there's no reason to stop with friends. Tell perfect strangers that you're trying to add to your garden. Taking walks in neighborhoods notorious for their great gardens is a great way to do this. If you see someone working in their garden, be quick about telling them how terrific things look. Most gardeners are friendly and just love to talk plants. You'll also find that most are also quite generous. Don't be afraid to ask for a slip or start of what they are working on. If they have a mature garden, they are probably on the lookout for ways to get rid of excess plants.

Community Garden Groups

Join volunteer gardening organizations in your community. Native plant societies, city beautification work parties, and invasive plant clean up crews are some that come to mind. All of these activities will be filled with other gardeners. You can get free plants *and* advice as you work side by side and make new friends.

Volunteer Plants

Keep your eyes open when you're working in your garden early in the spring for plants making their way up on their own. These plants are called "volunteer plants" or "babies" that

are coming up from seed.

The volunteer plants will often be a surprise since you did not specifically plant them. This means they likely won't appear where you'd expect them to be. The volunteer plants are quite easy to unearth with your hoe as you clean up. Simply save them, mark them or pot them up and move to a safe place to get a bit bigger before planting them in a permanent spot.

Save Seeds

If you already have plants, simply [save their seeds](#) to use in future years. It's an easy, eco-friendly way to get free plants. You can either start by using them to grow new plants indoors to place in the garden or sow them directly into the garden in the spring/summer. Also, be sure to save more than you need for your own garden. This will give you a supply of [seeds](#) to trade with others to bring in new plants to your garden for free.

Be Generous With Your Garden

While giving away extras from your own garden doesn't seem like a way to get free plants, in the world of gardening it's the way things work. The more generous you are, the more free plants that will end up at your door. I don't have a detailed explanation of why this works, but it does and you'll find that the more generous you are with the plants in your garden, the more that will find their way to your own garden.

Get More Bang for Your Buck

While this isn't a free way to get plants from day one, it is a way to get them in future years. If you do need to purchase some plants, be sure to buy the kinds that will [pay dividends](#). Buy [perennial](#) plants that need dividing every 3 – 5 years.

You can also start your own cuttings from woody-stemmed type

shrubs. Flowers like dahlias & calla lilies come from tubers that need to be divided regularly, too. Over just a few years, an initial investment in these types of plants will yield a very full garden.

There are also numerous houseplants that you can divide. Some, like the easy-to-care-for spider plant, will even produce babies for you.

If you've got other suggestions about ways to procure free plants, I'd love to [hear about them](#) – I'll just have to clear out another flower bed first!

Here's a quick video on how to divide perennials if you're not quite sure how to do it: