

## Plant a Theme Garden this Spring

By Susan Camp

Once again, Middle Peninsula and other Tidewater residents are undergoing the wild and wacky mood swings of a Virginia winter. A few weeks ago, I wrote about the long-anticipated arrival by gardeners of the annual seed and garden catalogs and how we can't wait to start planning for the spring planting season. Jim and I have already selected some new species for the front and vegetable gardens, but I am always thinking about trying out a new plan for a bed or container.

Earlier this week, I recalled a column I wrote in 2021 during the height of the pandemic about fun gardening projects for children. The website I referenced in the column is [kidsgardening.org](https://www.kidsgardening.org). The site is packed with fun-to-do gardening projects, activities, resources, and blogs developed by and for educators and caregivers. The projects are presented in an easy-to-follow format that covers materials, completion time, and detailed instructions.

As I reviewed some of the projects, searching for a new topic for this column, I noticed a section on theme gardens. I have thought about theme gardens in the past, but never actually tried planting one. The website made a theme garden for children sound like fun, and why can't grown-ups have fun, too?

The Three Sisters Garden with corn, beans, and squash is on their list, as well as a dinosaur garden of ferns and horsetail, and a giant's garden with 150-pound pumpkins, and 15-foot-tall sunflowers, but I opted for a pizza garden, a moon garden, or a Shakespearean Garden.

Planning instructions for each garden include sunlight, shade, and irrigation requirements and information about planting in a container or raised bed or directly into the ground. Raised beds are convenient, but may be too angular and rigid for some theme gardens. Pre-made containers of various shapes can provide more whimsical looks.

One website that discussed plants for a pizza garden suggested using a round container that will look like a pizza when planted. Pizza garden plants include Roma tomatoes, onions, garlic, sweet basil, Greek or Italian oregano, sweet peppers, and spinach. You could plant each herb or vegetable as a "slice" of the pizza. Most of these plants are easy to grow and require little attention once they are established. Anyone from 8 to 80 would love a pizza garden!

A moon garden filled with white flowers and silvery foliage is a lovely, romantic spot to enjoy a summer evening. You can plant this garden in the shape of a full or crescent moon. Place your moon garden in an area where moonlight is not blocked by a fence or other structure.

Select white or cool-hued flowers; warm tones of red, orange, and yellow will overpower and spoil the desired glowing effect of a moon garden. Candytuft, creeping phlox, sweet alyssum, and climbing white hydrangea pair well with the silvery leaves of Russian sage, lambs' ears, and a feathery-leaved artemisia like Powys Castle.

Fragrant flowers add to the pleasure of a moon garden. Night-blooming jasmine, flowering tobacco (Nicotiana), and moonflower or white morning glory all bloom at night and add their sweet, heady fragrances to the evening air. White angel's trumpet (Brugmansia) also flowers at night, but all parts are poisonous.

My final choice for a theme garden is a Shakespearean Garden. Shakespeare mentions more than 200 plant species in his plays and sonnets, and many scenes take place in gardens, orchards, or woodland bowers.

If you are patient and artistically gifted, you can design an English boxwood-bordered Elizabethan knot garden. Many plans are available online. If your goal is to have a garden of fragrant herbs that attract bees and butterflies, you can opt for a cottage garden or bed.

A Shakespearean Garden should include rosemary, thyme, lavender, rue, and savory. Pansies, fennel, columbine, and violets also have a place in a Shakespearean Garden. The list of flowers, herbs, and low-growing shrubs for this garden theme is almost endless.

Indulge your inner child this spring, and plant a theme garden.

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