

WELCOME TO LAS CRUCES

A Beginner's Gardening Packet for Our Desert Climate



Sunny days, beautiful desert views and a long growing season make Las Cruces a wonderful place to garden - once you learn to work with our climate.

Prepared by **Guzman's Garden Centers**

guzmansgreenhouse.com

Start with the Las Cruces climate

Las Cruces has abundant sunshine, low humidity, hot summers, occasional hard freezes, spring winds and limited rainfall. That combination can surprise gardeners arriving from wetter parts of the country. A plant that was easy to grow in another state may need shade, different soil preparation or more careful watering here.

Do not feel that you must finish your entire landscape immediately. Spend a little time watching where the morning and afternoon sun falls, where water collects and which areas receive reflected heat from walls, sidewalks and gravel.

Local rule of thumb: afternoon sun is much more intense than morning sun. A location described as 'part shade' may still be too hot if it receives direct western exposure.

Five conditions to notice

- **Sun:** Record which areas receive morning sun, afternoon sun or shade.
- **Wind:** Young trees and broad-leaved plants may need protection while establishing.
- **Reflected heat:** South- and west-facing walls, rock mulch and pavement raise temperatures around plants.
- **Cold pockets:** Low areas can be colder on winter nights than nearby protected locations.
- **Drainage:** Water that remains around roots can cause serious problems, even in the desert.

Before buying plants

Measure the planting space and take a few photographs. Consider the mature height and width of every tree or shrub, along with nearby walls, roofs, utility lines and walkways. Choosing for mature size prevents expensive pruning or removal later.

Soil, caliche and drainage

Soils around Las Cruces vary from sandy and rocky to heavy clay. Many properties also have caliche, a hardened layer of calcium carbonate that can restrict drainage and root growth. New construction may contain compacted fill soil or leftover building material.

Dig a test hole before planning a large bed. Fill it with water and observe how readily it drains. If the water sits for a long time, improve the planting area and choose plants that can tolerate the conditions. Do not create a small, heavily amended 'flowerpot' surrounded by compacted native soil, because water may collect around the roots.

Helpful soil practices

- Mix compost into broad garden-bed areas when growing flowers, vegetables or plants that appreciate organic matter.
- Break through restrictive caliche where practical and safe, while protecting buried utilities.
- Keep the natural root flare of trees visible; never bury a tree trunk under extra soil or mulch.
- Apply mulch to reduce evaporation, but keep it several inches away from trunks and plant crowns.
- Use raised beds or containers when native soil is exceptionally difficult.

[Read: Types of Soil in the Southwest](#)

Water deeply, then allow air to return

New plants need regular attention while their roots become established. Deep watering encourages roots to move outward and downward. Frequent shallow sprinkling can keep roots near the surface, where soil dries quickly.

There is no single watering schedule for every yard. Plant type, soil, season, wind, shade and irrigation output all matter. Check the soil near the root zone before automatically adding more water.

Drip irrigation works well when emitters are placed over the active root area and inspected regularly. As trees and shrubs grow, move or add emitters outward rather than keeping all the water beside the trunk.

[Read: How Often Should You Water Plants in Las Cruces?](#)

Dependable choices for a first landscape

Availability changes with the season, and every yard is different. These plant groups are good starting points to discuss with our nursery staff.

Shade and ornamental trees

- Chinese pistache for dependable fall color and summer shade
- Desert willow for flowers, heat tolerance and a lighter canopy
- Chitalpa for showy blooms and a Southwest appearance
- Afghan or Mondell pine where an evergreen screen is appropriate

Shrubs and flowering plants

- Texas sage, red yucca and autumn sage for sunny, water-wise areas
- Rosemary, lavender and lantana for fragrance or seasonal color
- Pyracantha or waxleaf privet where a larger screen is needed
- Pansies, dianthus, calendula and snapdragons for cool-season color

A few cautions

- 'Drought tolerant' does not mean 'no water,' especially during the first two growing seasons.
- Some non-native plants perform beautifully here but require more irrigation and protection.
- Avoid placing large trees too close to foundations, walls, septic systems or utility lines.
- Check whether a plant is toxic or thorny when children or pets use the yard.

[Check the Plant Hardiness Zone guide](#)

**Bring photographs, rough measurements and notes about sunlight when you visit.
That information makes plant recommendations much more useful.**

A simple seasonal guide

Season	Good priorities
Spring	Plant many trees, shrubs, herbs and warm-season vegetables. Watch new growth for wind damage and rising water needs.
Summer	Concentrate on watering, mulch and heat protection. Plant selectively and avoid unnecessary stress during extreme heat.
Fall	An excellent time for many trees, shrubs, perennials and cool-season flowers. Roots can establish while temperatures moderate.
Winter	Protect tender plants, reduce irrigation as conditions require and plan improvements for the coming season.

Your first-yard checklist

- ☐ Walk the property at several times of day and map sun and shade.
- ☐ Locate irrigation lines and contact the proper utility-locating service before digging.
- ☐ Test drainage in the areas where you want trees or garden beds.
- ☐ Choose one or two correctly placed shade trees before filling the yard with smaller plants.
- ☐ Group plants with similar water and sunlight needs.
- ☐ Inspect drip emitters and learn how your irrigation controller works.
- ☐ Leave room for mature growth instead of planting for an instantly full appearance.
- ☐ Take photos and measurements to Guzman's Garden Centers when you need help.

[Read: Plants to Grow in Each Season](#)

Welcome to gardening in Las Cruces

Gardening in the desert can feel confusing at first, but it becomes much easier once you understand your yard. Start with good placement, healthy soil drainage and sensible watering. Add plants gradually and learn how they respond through a full year of heat, wind and winter weather.

Guzman's Garden Centers has helped Las Cruces gardeners choose plants for our local conditions for many years. Visit either of our Las Cruces locations and tell us what you are trying to accomplish. Photos of your yard, measurements and information about sunlight will help us point you in the right direction.

A successful Las Cruces landscape does not have to be complicated. Choose the right plant for the right place, water it correctly and give it room to grow.

Continue learning

- Visit guzmansgreenhouse.com for local articles on soil, watering, shade trees, heat protection and seasonal planting.
- Join the Guzman's Garden Centers newsletter for timely Southwest gardening information.
- Find addresses, maps and directions on the [Our Locations page](#).
- Learn about [Southwest Gardening Made Simple](#) for a more complete guide to gardening in our region.

IMPORTANT NOTE

This packet provides general gardening guidance. Conditions can vary greatly among Las Cruces properties. Irrigation requirements depend on the plant, soil, weather, exposure and irrigation system. Follow product labels, observe local watering restrictions and contact qualified professionals when working near utilities or making major drainage changes.

Guzman's Garden Centers

Helping Las Cruces grow