

## **“Mary, Mary quite contrary How does your garden grow?”**

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This year some folks are saying, “Not so hot.”

Plants that do not flower can be frustrating. It takes patience, some detective work and sufficient knowledge about the plants’ problems to adequately address the issues. There are any number of reasons why annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs do not flower. Here are a few.

### **Plant Maturity**

A common reason why woody plants fail to flower is plant maturity. Trees such as apple and pear trees do not flower (and bear fruit) for four to six years depending on the cultivar. Lilacs may not bloom for three to five years. Some fruit tree cultivars are alternate bearing trees meaning they flower heavily one year then regroup to gather energy the next.

Newly planted perennials need time to establish themselves. Older perennials eventually need to be divided.

### **Weather**

Flower buds are less hardy than leaf buds. Low winter temperatures may kill the flower buds, while not damaging the leaf buds. There is no way to prevent this type of injury. Flower buds on plants that are not hardy to this zone suffer damage more quickly. Late spring frosts can also have a damaging effect on flowering plants. Low temperatures, fluctuating temperatures and late frost or freeze events are all potential problems as well as cooler summer temperatures.

Extremely dry conditions in summer may weaken a plant and result in fewer flowers the following year. Drought stress can impact flowering and plant health.

### **Sunlight**

Read the tag descriptions for all trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals. The amount of sunlight required for each individual type of plant will dictate the success of flower production. There is a difference between partial sun (which requires more sun for plants) and partial shade (which requires less). If a plant requires full sun, it may not flower if planted in the shade. The opposite is true as well.

### **Pruning**

Know when to prune trees and shrubs. Incorrect timing may cause a failure to flower. Some plants flower in last year’s growth. Prune these plants right after the flowers have spent. Many shrubs

set their flower buds in late spring. Pruning these in the summer or fall prevents flowering the following year.

### **Nitrogen**

Excessive nitrogen in the soil promotes leaf growth resulting in large plants, but stymies flower production. Test the soil to evaluate the nutrients in the soil. A simple way to reduce the nitrogen content in the soil is by spreading mulch. Mulch uses nitrogen to break down. Know the plants. Determine how much and the type of fertilizer to use. While too much fertilizer can be a detriment to flower production, not enough can also be a problem. It is best to apply a balanced fertilizer such as 12-12-12 or 6-10-4 for best results. Nutrient deficiencies may result in reduced flower production and/or poor pollination.

### **Wildlife**

It goes without saying that wildlife can cause problems in the garden. Birds eat berries. Rabbits and deer eat foliage.

### **Fungal Diseases and Insects**

Learn what fungal diseases impact plant growth. Quick easy internet searches will provide information about which diseases are common to specific plants. Insects can also impact the plants. Again, search the internet for determine which insects ravage various species of plants. It is highly recommended that in searching the internet the best advice is provided by university extension offices (look for websites that included "edu" at the end of the title.)

Be aware of growing conditions in the landscape. Proper placement of plants has a major impact flowering.