2026 Garden Trends (published 2026-01-10)
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Since the gardening boom during COVID, backyard gardening continues to be a popular pastime. Over 80% of households report that they engage in some type of gardening, and over 40% undertake some vegetable gardening. As it continues to increase in popularity with a younger demographic and, as both the weather and grocery prices become more unpredictable, how will gardening change?

Whether you move with the trends or keep doing what you usually do, learning about what's new is useful for the home gardener. For one thing, trends may affect what you find in your local nurseries. The changes that will likely continue into 2026 include homeowners growing more food, especially fruit. There is continued movement towards sustainable gardening practices, which include choosing native plants and focusing on soil health. More people are also converting lawns into pollinator gardens.

Edible gardens have long been a staple in many Tennessean backyards. A review by the National Institutes of Health found that growing one's own food increases exercise. Growing your own vegetables also leads to increasing the number of vegetable servings eaten, especially for children who are involved in gardening. Eating more vegetables provides the bonuses of better nutrition and some weight loss.

Sustainable gardening is another positive practice that has been on the rise for the last decade. It encompasses the many choices that gardeners make to use resources wisely. It results in beneficial impacts on the soil, habitat, and wildlife. The specific sustainable practices that are increasing in popularity include focusing on soil health with composting, using no-till methods, and reducing or omitting the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. No-till gardening preserves soil structure and increases microbial life. Instead of tilling a garden, the gardener lays down compost and mulch, which can improve heavy clay soil, while saving our backs.

By composting at home, gardeners can reduce waste in landfills and reduce the cost of buying compost and other soil amendments. The environmentally responsible decision to avoid expensive chemical fertilizers and pesticides is also financially responsible. Hot composting is faster than traditional outdoor composting. People are also starting to use worms (vermicomposting) to create compost indoors.

In hot composting, layers of green materials alternating with brown materials are piled directly on the ground. Greens include leaves or grass clippings; browns are wood chips and small branches. Moisten the layers with water but avoid making the pile soggy. The hot system results in compost in 4 to 6 weeks but requires some effort. The layers need to sit for several days until

the temperature inside the pile reaches 130 to 160 degrees F. Once achieved, wait 3 days, then turn the pile and repeat turning about every week. This provides more oxygen to keep the hot process going and helps all the materials mix and be exposed to the heating process.

Using worms to help create compost is also becoming popular. You need a worm bin, bedding, such as shredded paper that contains no coloring agents, coir, or decaying leaves, composting worms (*Eisenia fetida* (aka red wiggler), and food scraps. The bin can be kept in a garage, basement, kitchen, bathroom or patio.

The recent movement to choose native plants to support native insect and bird populations is also continuing to grow. More people than ever report buying a plant that is native to their region. The Tennessee Department of Transportation's Project Milkweed distributed more than 188,000 packets of seeds in 2024. The program continues to support monarch butterflies every year.

Native plants not only attract pollinators but provide food and shelter for birds and insects. Meadow gardens are particularly growing in popularity. Using native perennials helps mimic natural meadows and prairies.

While it's fun to see what's trending in gardening, it's even more fulfilling to build a sustainable habitat that feeds the pollinators, the birds, and the gardener.

Resources

"Home Gardening and Associations with Fruit and Vegetable Intake and BMI," https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10200511

"Sustainable Gardening Trends for 2026," https://extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden-news/sustainable-gardening-trends-2026

"Food Price Outlook, 2025 and 2026," https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings

"White Paper: Costs and Benefits of Vegetable Gardening," https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/paper-vegetable-gardening-cost-analysis/#:~:text=Introduction,gardening%20relative%20to%20the%20benefits

"Pollinator Habitat Program," https://tnpollinators.org/meetpolli/

"Garden Trends for 2026," https://www.chicagobotanic.org/plant-information/garden-trends-2026

"It's Alive! The Wonder of Hot Composting," https://ucanr.edu/blog/coastal-gardener/article/its-alive-wonder-hot-composting

"Vermicomposting for Households," https://composting.ces.ncsu.edu/vermicomposting-2/vermicomposting-for-households/

"Worms Can Recycle Your Garbage," https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/worms-can-recycle-your-garbage

How do I ask a question?
If you have questions for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.