

The 7 Steps To Refresh Your Garden

A simple strategy to improve your garden over time

A beautiful garden makes you feel better. Scientific research has shown that greenery has a calming effect on our nervous system. That is why establishing a garden around your home is so important for you and your family.

Fortunately, our weather here in Zambia is warm enough for us to grow many plants throughout most of the year. In this guide, we will do some self-reflection to explore what we want from our gardens before looking at the practical steps to put everything in place.

PART 1: WHAT KIND OF GARDEN WILL WORK FOR YOU?

You have probably downloaded this guide because you want to do something differently in your garden. If you are living in a home with an existing garden that you want to refresh, this guide is for you. Let's explore what you want and need a bit further before we suggest the next steps.

How do you spend time in your garden?

A garden has to be designed around your needs, so think about how you want to spend time in it. For example:

- **Entertaining:** If you enjoy having friends and family around, think about seating areas and outdoor cooking locations.
- **Family:** If you have kids playing outside, you can design a playground or a dedicated lawn area.
- **Personal Enjoyment:** If you enjoy quiet time alone, position your favorite beds close by so you can easily admire and work on them.



How much time can you spend in your garden?

Gardens evolve over time, and the single largest investment you will make is your time. Ask yourself how much time you can realistically invest. Even with a gardener to help, the best gardens still need you to spend time shaping their development. If you do not have much time, choose a simple design with perennial plants that require little maintenance.

Do you have the skills to begin the process?

Gardening is a journey; every beautiful space takes years to develop. Fortunately, nature is forgiving so whatever your experience level, you can learn as you go. It is highly beneficial to develop your skills by asking questions and looking online.


For local inspiration on gardening in Zambia, check out:

- [The Greenspace Zambia YouTube channel](#), where we visit local home gardens.
- [Gardening in and Around Zambia](#), a popular Facebook page.
- [Local gardening clubs](#), which host workshops and garden visits around the city.

What kind of soil do you have?

Soil is the foundation of any good garden. The best soils contain organic matter (like dead leaves), providing nutrients for plants and underground flora. Conventional gardening often depletes this layer. Fix your soil over a few years by following two simple principles:

- **No naked soil:** Uncovered soil gets baked by the sun, driving away organisms. Keep it covered with mulch, compost, or ground cover. Keep adding layers of these materials and over time watch the impact it has in your garden.
- **Avoid turning the soil:** Avoid unnecessary digging. Underground organisms aerate the ground and feed your roots; turning the soil kills them.

 **WATCH:** [Check out this interesting video from Locatguna Organics on the benefits of nurturing your soil.](#)

Can you responsibly water your garden throughout the year?

In urban areas, water is increasingly scarce. Many of us draw from boreholes, sharing groundwater with the wider community. We must design spaces that weather the dry season responsibly:

- **Reduce lawn sizes:** Lawns consume significant water, especially in direct sunlight.
- **Go indigenous:** Use water-wise, indigenous plants naturally adapted to our dry seasons.
- **Harvest and recycle:** Collect rainwater or safely recycle household graywater.
- **Plant waterwise:** Choose plants that do not require large amounts of water to look nice.

 **WATCH:** [Check out this interesting video from Back 2 Basics Organics on harvesting water in urban areas.](#)

How much sunlight does your garden get?

Observe how sunlight and shadows move through your yard, through the seasons. Getting the right amount of light is important for plant health and as you select plants, choose those that do well in the different areas of your garden.

- June/July bring cold snaps, while September/October are punishingly hot.
- Vegetables, fruiting plants and flowers thrive in full sunlight, but may need shade netting in the hotter months.
- Most plants will grow slower in winter.
- If you have deep shade, research specific shade-loving varieties as many plants struggle to survive in dark areas.

What look do you want for your garden to look and feel like?

You will achieve a cohesive look by choosing a specific theme, style, and color palette:

A formal garden (left below); is based around straight lines, geometric shapes and clipped shrubs. A **natural garden style (right below)** uses curved beds and winding paths.



A tropical garden(left below); is lush and jungle-like, but requires significant water inputs. A **waterwise garden (right below);** uses plants that do not require much water.



An edible garden (below) designs the garden completely or in part around edible plants, they can be separate or incorporated into your ornamental beds.



PART 2: THE BIGGER PICTURE

Your garden does not actually exist in isolation. Everything that you do is connected to those gardens around you.

- When we pump water for our lawns in the dry season how does it affect the community?
- If your neighbour sprays insecticide how will it affect your garden?
- When chemicals seep into the water table how does it affect your drinking water?
- If there are no trees or plants on the road, how does the dust from wind and passing cars affect you?

When planning our gardens for the long-term, we need to think about the community too. There are neighbourhoods in Zambia where their roads are lined with trees and are significantly cooler in the summer heat.



We know there are larger issues at play here, but as a community what can be done to make our cities greener?

PART 3: 7 STEP PROCESS TO A GARDEN REFRESH

Here is a simple process to refresh your garden. Remember, this is a continuous journey to be repeated over time as you learn how your unique space fits together.

1. Make Space

- **Simple cleanup:** Tidy old branches and leaves. Never burn them! It's illegal to burn rubbish or garden waste in most towns in Zambia. Pile them up to create mulch or compost.
- **Prune, don't clear:** Remove dead wood but save established plants. Do this before the rainy growth season to prevent shock.
- **Loosen the earth:** Break up the top 10cm of heavily compacted or swept earth using a hoe, then top with compost, and keep adding mulch and compost over time.

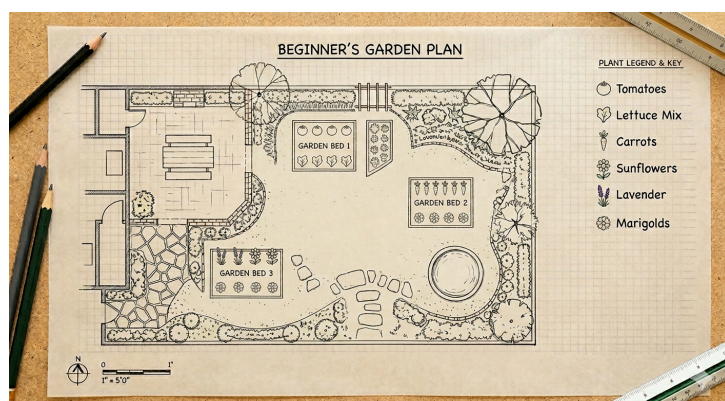
 [WATCH: Check out this interesting video playlist on making compost and improving soils](#)

2. Cover the Soil

- **Use mulch:** Spread leaves, grass, or bark 5-7cm deep to trap moisture and regulate temperature during hot October days. This helps soil retain moisture and stops heat reflecting onto plants.
- **Living mulch:** Grow low carpets like Sweet Potato vines, Wandering Dude (*Tradescantia*), or even Jade Creeper to protect soil naturally.
- **Make compost:** Layer green kitchen scraps with brown yard waste in a shaded corner. Keep damp, turn weekly, and apply.

3. Design Your Garden

This is where your garden starts to come to life. Sketch a rough plan of your yard. It doesn't need to be a masterpiece, just realistic about plants, spaces for recreation, paths, and planting beds.



Don't try to do too much at once. You will have more success if you work in phases and focus on one part of your garden at a time.

The plan can change as you learn more about what you need.

Create a plant list of all the plants and quantities you think you will need.

Keep the layering principle in mind: an upper layer of trees, a medium layer of shrubs, and a lower layer of ground covers.

4. Source Your Plants

Visit nurseries across the city to see what thrives locally. Look out for:

- **Perennials:** Long-lasting structures like lavender, rosemary, geraniums, and dracaena.
- **Evergreen trees:** Year-round green canopies like *Trichilia emetica* (Natal Mahogany), *Khaya anthotheca* (Red Mahogany), and *Podocarpus* (Yellowwood) and of course fruit trees.
- **Drought-tolerant & Native:** Hardy succulents (aloes, agaves) and indigenous shrubs that require minimal supplemental watering.

FIND SUPPLIERS: [The Greenspace Online Garden Directory is a really useful resource where you can find a list of businesses who supply plants and garden supplies.](#)

5. Propagate Plants

Propagating plants from what you already own saves thousands of kwacha and ensures you get exactly the plants you want, and they are ready when you need them.

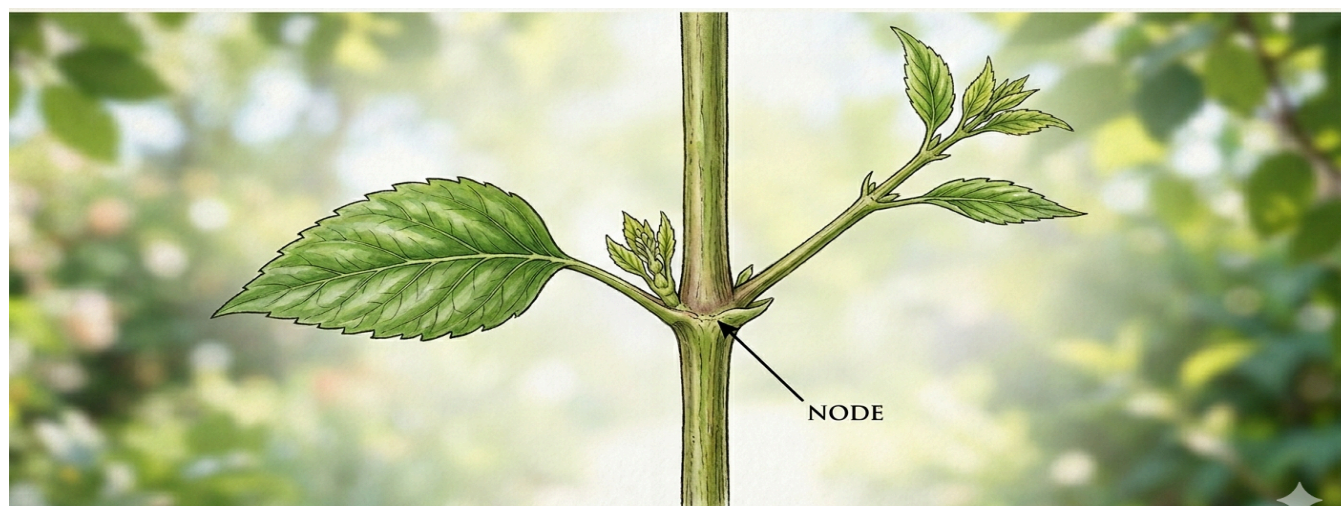
Planting from seed

Follow seed packet guidelines carefully. Keep seeds in damp soil until they germinate. At about eight weeks, they are usually ready to be transplanted into the ground.

 **WATCH:** [Check out this interesting video on how to plant into seed trays](#)

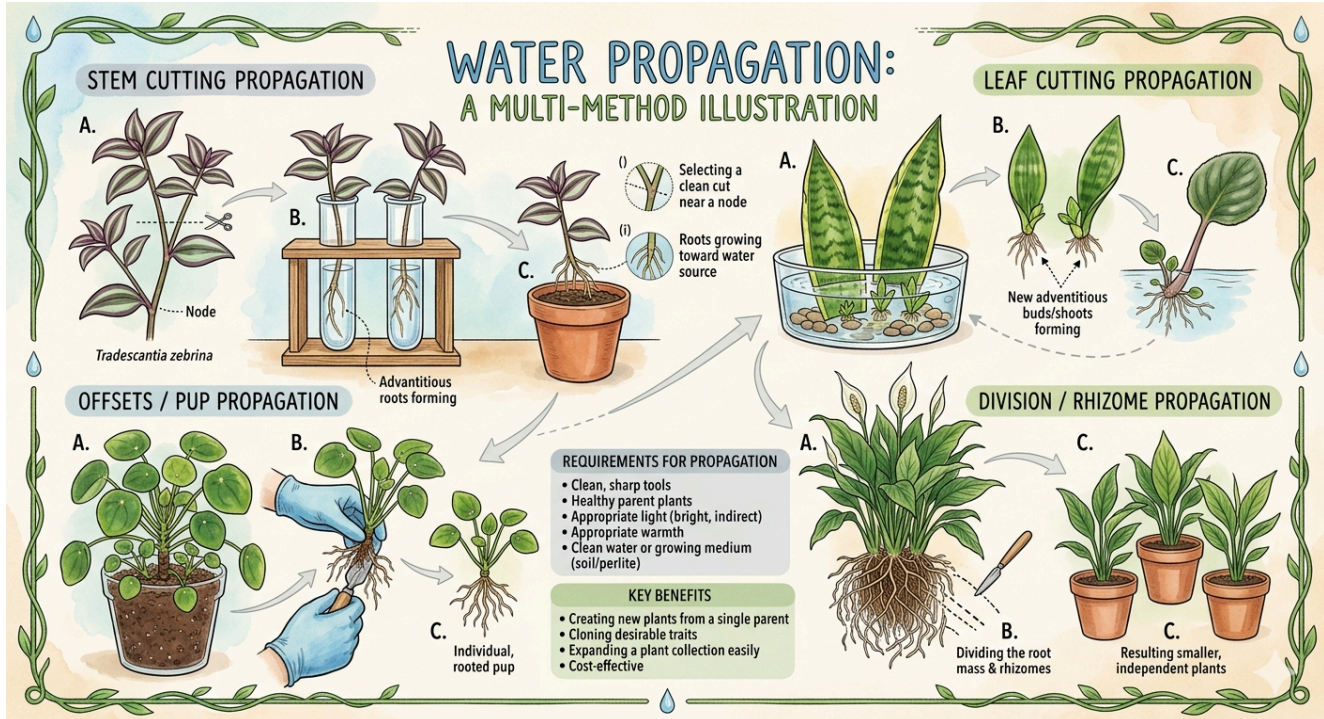
Vegetative cuttings

Take a 10–15cm snip of a healthy stem right below a leaf node, then strip the lower leaves, and push it into a pot of loose soil and compost. Keep it shaded and moist; it will root natively in a few weeks.



Water rooting

Many choices can be placed directly in water until they develop healthy root structures. Place a stem with at least one node in a clean glass of water. Keep leaves above water in indirect sunlight, changing the water weekly. When roots reach 5cm, gently pot them into your beds.



6. Plant Slowly

Once you have all the plants that you need, space out your planting projects to tackle just one or two beds at a time. This allows you to observe growth patterns and correct layout errors. New roots require focused watering; pacing your implementation prevents the pressure and expense of watering a massive yard all at once.

7. Plant Thickly

Remember our golden rule: we must never leave soil exposed to the harsh sun. Ensure every single centimeter of your ground will be covered in dense foliage planting, natural mulch, rich compost, or protective structural shade.

8. Enjoy the Process

Gardening is a living, breathing process, not a static project set in stone. You should never feel locked into your initial layout; if a plant isn't thriving in its spot, or if your vision for the space simply shifts, feel empowered to dig them up and move them around.

It is your garden, and it should reflect your evolving tastes and needs. Don't be afraid to experiment, trial new combinations, or completely reimagine a corner of your yard. It's okay. Do it your way. Just don't go broke buying plants! 😊

Visit GreenspaceZambia.com for more tips on how to garden in Zambia.