



Planting sugar cane in the home landscape

Sugar cane (*Saccharum* genus) is desired both as an ornamental grass in home landscapes, as sweet juice snack by many people, and planted extensively as a commercial crop for sugar and other by-products in Florida and many parts of the tropics. For the home gardener interested in growing sugar cane in the home landscape, the following eight steps provide some guidance on how to do regardless of the variety chosen.



1. Test the soil before you begin the sugar cane growing process. Soil pH testing kits are available at plant nurseries and garden centers. The best option is to have the soil tested at your county extension office.
2. Break up the soil with a pitchfork in order to create a fine-planting medium. Mix lime in with the soil if the soil test reveals that the pH is lower than 5.5, or add peat moss if the soil is above 6.5. Follow the instructions on the packaging for allocation amounts.
3. Dig a trench 3 inches deep, 4 to 10 inches apart. Add an 8-8-8 fertilizer mix to the soil in the trench per label instruction



4. Place the sugar cane seed pieces in the trench horizontally, side by side. Backfill the trench with the original soil. Pat the soil to remove air pockets.
5. Water the sugar cane with a soaker hose, which will provide deep watering. Maintain moist soil at a depth of 1 inch at all times. Shoots will begin to sprout from the soil within 1 to 3 weeks after planting in moist soil.
6. Add soil to the trench to make it taller as the sugar cane plants begin to grow. A slight elevation of 2 to 3 inches should suffice.

7. The elevation of the soil will help to reduce weed growth between the shoots.
8. Remove pests by picking them off of the sugar cane. In Florida, mealy bugs, grubs, aphids and termites can invade sugar cane crops. Use an insecticide in cases where pests are becoming a problem. Make sure it is safe to use on plants grown for consumption.



9. Harvest the sugar cane one year after planting. Harvesting can begin anytime during the fall, usually after September 1 in South Florida. Use a sharp pair of pruning shears to cut the mature sugar cane stalks down to the soil line.

For more information on growing sugar cane in the backyard, see the University of Florida's Backyard Sugarcane factsheet at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/sc052>

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