



Garden Myths and Misinformation

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The Myth	The Reality
Myths about soil	
Clay soil is bad.	Yes and no. Clay is often too wet, but it is also very fertile soil. Amend with organic matter to improve drainage.
The soil under my evergreens is acidic.	Not really. Evergreen needles are acidic, but their pH raises to neutral as they decompose. If the soil under evergreens was acidic, it would be a good thing. Our plants would grow better.
Add sand to clay to improve the soil.	False. Clay and sand together will make concrete. This is due to a difference between the size of sand and clay particles. The small clay particles fill in around the big clay particles, leading to a very solid mass.
Myths about fertilizer	
If a little is good, more is better.	False. Too much fertilizer can have detrimental effects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Weak, succulent growth ➤ Growth more prone to certain diseases ➤ Excess leafy growth and less flowering ➤ Production of thatch in lawns ➤ Wasting your money ➤ Excess product into the environment
Trees need to be fertilized every year (or twice a year).	It all depends. Young trees putting on a lot of new growth can benefit from yearly fertilization. As trees begin to mature, the growth slows (as it should) and fertilizer may be needed only every 3 to 5 years.
Fertilizer fixes everything.	False. Fertilizer only fixes a nutrient deficiency. It won't compensate for too much shade, wet soils, drought or other problems.
Fertilizer is good for a plant under stress.	Not really. We need to identify the cause(s) of the stress and alleviate it.
Foliar feeding is an effective way to fertilize a plant.	Not really. Roots are really the organs of absorption. Foliar feeding probably won't damage plants as long as the product is formulated for that purpose. There is not much research that supports foliar feeding.

The Myth	The Reality
Myths about Watering	
Newly planted plants should be watered everyday.	False. Newly planted plants have limited root systems and should be checked <u>regularly</u> , but they do not necessarily need to be watered every day. Feel the soil and water when needed.
If you run the lawn sprinkler at mid-day you will burn the leaves of your plants.	False. This is an old wives tale. The water will NOT focus the mid-day sun and cause burning. It is better to run the lawn sprinkler early in the day, as the wind speed is often lower and less water is lost to evaporation.
Drought tolerant plant don't need to be watered	Not really. Drought tolerant is not the same as drought-loving, so water is still important. Drought tolerant plants are better able to deal with drier conditions.
Wilted leaves always means the soil is too dry.	False. Plants wilt when their roots are unable to take up water. That may be due to: Soils that are too dry Soils that are saturated with water Root damage from disease, insects or injury
You should water every day during a drought.	False. It is best to water deeply and infrequently. Provide about one inch of water every week during normal weather. Shorten that to one inch every four to five days during a drought. The result will be deeper roots that help the plant sustain itself during dry weather.
Tree roots are very deep, so trees don't need to be watered.	False. Tree roots are actually fairly shallow, with most trees having the majority of their roots in the top two feet of soil.
Myths about Mulching	
Mulching stops ALL weeds.	Not really. Mulch is very effective for preventing germination of weed seeds, but it will not stop weeds growing from perennial roots.
Mulching should be done early in the season when we can't do much else in the garden.	False. Mulch acts like insulation. If you put it on soil that is wet and cold, you will keep it wet and cold longer.
Mulch should be piled up around the trunk of the tree.	False. Mulch conserves water and suppresses weeds. It can't do either unless it is spread over the soil. Mulch piled against a tree trunk may keep it wet, leading to rot. 'Volcano' mulching may also hide that a tree has been planted shallowly.

The Myth	The Reality
Myths about Planting	
Plant trees above grade to compensate for wet clay soil.	False. This won't help with drainage and it leaves part of the root ball exposed. Exposed roots are susceptible to dehydration and physical damage. Also, since roots grow out horizontally from the root ball, the tree won't be able to develop a full root system.
The trees are on sale in November, so that must be a good time to plant them. Right?	Not really. When we talk about 'fall' planting, we really want to plant in the early part of fall (Sept to mid-Oct). The soil is still warm at that time, so roots begin to form. A tree planted in November might not do much due to cool soils.
You can stop the spread of aggressive plants like mint, by putting barriers in the ground when you plant the plants.	Probably not. Plants with spreading root systems often climb over, under or around barriers.
When you plant a tree, add a lot of loose, organic matter to the planting hole.	False. Tree roots will grow easily in loose amendments, but will stop when they hit the hard clay. This could lead to circling roots in the planting hole. Water will also drain quickly through the loose amendments but will percolate very slowly into the clay, leading to a bathtub effect.
A newly planted tree should be staked.	It all depends. Most trees don't need to be staked, but there are some exceptions: Trees in high pedestrian traffic areas Trees with unstable root balls Trees with dense canopies planted in windy sites
Myths about Pruning	
Pruning cuts should be painted or sealed.	Not really. Sealants and paints may seal in pathogens. Over time, they crack and let water in. Proper pruning allows the tree to seal the edges of the wound.
All shrubs can be pruned in fall or winter.	False. Shrubs that flower in spring made their buds in summer. Pruning them in fall or winter will remove the flower buds. Prune spring-flowering shrubs within two weeks after flowering ends.
Trees should be pruned every year.	It all depends. Young trees putting on a lot of new growth may need to be pruned annually to produce a strong structure for the tree. As trees get older, pruning is more maintenance to remove problems and should be done as needed, not yearly.

The Myth	The Reality
Myths about Insects/Diseases/Weeds	
Ants killed my tree.	False. Carpenter ants show up when there is already rotting wood on a tree. The ants did not cause the tree to decline, they are taking advantage of the fact the tree is in decline.
Marigolds will keep insects out of my vegetable garden.	Not really. Planting marigolds around the vegetable garden will not repel pests. Research shows that growing them and then rototilling them into the soil may repel one pest, soil nematodes.
Milky spore will kill Japanese beetle grubs in my lawn.	It all depends. Milky spore (a bacterium) has trouble surviving the winter in northern climates. Universities report success with the product in southern states, but not in the north. Even where the bacterium does survive, it works slowly.
Japanese beetle traps are an effective control measure for Japanese beetles.	Not really. They work too well! They draw Japanese beetles to the point where the bag can't hold them all. They may actually attract more beetles to your yard.
If a little pesticide is good, more is better.	False. Pesticides MUST be used according to label directions only! These products have been tested extensively to determine the effective dose. Using more may: Kill beneficial insects Waste product and money Pollute the environment unnecessarily
Organic pesticides are completely safe to use.	Not always. While many of these products have a very low toxicity, there can still be concerns. Use these products with care and read the label.
All weed killers (herbicides) are the same.	False. There are many different types of weed killers and they work in different ways.
Planting a groundcover will prevent weeds from growing.	Not really. Groundcovers seldom grow thickly enough to completely stop weeds from growing. The result is weeds growing in the groundcover which means a lot of hand weeding.
Myths about Trees	
Planting a large tree will give me a mature tree in a shorter amount of time.	Not really. Trees with a smaller trunk diameter (1.5-2.5 inches) usually establish more quickly than those with larger trunk (4-6 inches) diameter and often surpass the larger specimen.

The Myth	The Reality
If I cut one or two roots, it won't hurt my tree.	Not really. There will always be <u>some</u> consequence to cutting tree roots. Possible problems: Reduced water uptake by the tree Reduced stability if too many roots are removed Disease organisms may be able to enter the roots. Decline on the tree due to the above issues
Fast-growing trees are better than slow-growing ones.	Not always. There is sometimes a trade-off. Fast growing trees may be weak wooded.
Myths about Lawn Care	
The first time you mow in spring, you should scalp the lawn very low.	False. The first mowing can be a little shorter than during the season, but scalping is not needed. Scalping the lawn puts it under stress. It also exposes the soil to sun that can stimulate weed seeds to grow.
I see crabgrass preventer in the store in February, so it must be time to apply it. Right?	False. Crabgrass seed won't germinate until the SOIL temperature has been 55 degree or above for 5 to 7 days. Most years that does not happen until mid to late April. Crabgrass preventer lasts only about 60 days, so don't apply too early.
Lawns need to be fertilized four times a year.	Not really. One or two fertilizer treatments can be adequate for many home lawns. Use a fast-release fertilizer in September. Add a slow-release fertilizer in May if desired.
When I mow the lawn, if I don't collect the clippings, my lawn will develop thatch.	False. Lawn clippings do not cause thatch, but may contribute to it. Over-fertilizing and over-watering can speed up the process. Clippings do not need to be collected, simply mow regularly, removing no more than 1/3 of the blade.
My lawn is brown, it must have grubs.	It all depends. If the lawn is brown AND can be pulled up like a rug, grubs are likely the problem (grubs eat the roots). If the lawn does not pull up easily, then it may be a fungal problem or drought.
Myths about Miscellaneous Topics	
All hydrangeas can produce blue flowers	False. Only one species common to our area (<i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i>) can produce blue flowers and only when the soil pH is acidic.
You should water orchids with an ice cube.	False. Many orchids are tropical and ice is cold. Also an ice cube does not produce much water. Water orchids the way you water house plants.