

BASIC GARDENING TIPS

The three most important considerations for successful gardening are:

1. Soil Conditions
2. Watering
3. Fertilizing

SOIL CONDITIONS

Determine the present quality of your soil. If your soil has too much clay or shale, you need to amend it before planting. Up to 60% of amendment may be necessary. "Amendments" include peat moss, planting mix, garden compost, composted manure, and perlite.

Shale soil won't hold moisture long enough for plant roots to absorb water. Adding peat moss or garden compost is critical for moisture retention.

If the soil has too much clay there will not be enough oxygen for the roots to "breathe". Clay soils stay wet too long, encouraging molds and fungus to grow. Consequently, roots suffocate or die of disease. Roots, like our lungs, need a balance of moisture, air and nutrients. In this case, perlite and SKH Planting Mix or peat moss would be beneficial.

WATERING

The condition of your soil determines how much you water. If you amend your soil properly, watering will be less frequent and much more effective. After the soil is amended, concentrate on the individual plant's water requirements.

Lawns and most annuals have a shallow root system (3-8 inches). Water plants about every 2-3 days, the 1st week. NEVER WATER EVERY DAY (except perhaps during 95 degree + and windy conditions). Too much water prevents oxygen from re-entering soil space and causes the roots to suffocate.

Shrubs and **trees** have deeper roots (up to 3 feet for shrubs, more for trees) and need deeper, less frequent watering every 7 to 10 days. Once established, some plants require watering even less frequently than that.

The 2 most important rules of watering are:

1. **THOROUGHLY saturate the root system.**
2. **DO NOT water again until soil is somewhat dry.**

Plants need a good DEEP drink (a little water on the tongue of a thirsty man will not quench his thirst).

Plants have the ability to wait for rain. Over watering and frequent, shallow watering are most common problems and the hardest to remedy. If the soil condition is poor and TOO MUCH or TOO LITTLE water is applied, plants become stressed and unable to fight off problem invaders such as insects and diseases. Plants must have good air spaces (pore spaces) in the soil in order to thrive.

Always apply water slowly, thoroughly saturating the root system. Allow soil to become nearly dry before watering again.

BASIC GARDENING TIPS, cont.

Fertilizing

NEVER Fertilize a dry plant. yes, you mix the fertilizer in water, but you DON'T then pour it on a thirsty plant. You need to THOROUGHLY water your dry plant one day before feeding. Fertilizer "burns" the roots of dry plants but plump, moisture-filled roots happily drink it up.

Annuals are the "speed demons" of the plant family. They produce all their growth and flowers in one season. They need a LOT of fuel. Feed annuals every week or every 3rd watering for best results.

Perennials fall into many different categories for feeding. A general rule would be to feed with a granule perennial food (10-12-10), late in April through early August.

One last note on planting in poor soil that has been amended: Most gardeners dig a new hole for planting, removing most native (existing) soil, and then add 75-100% of amendments in the space. In clay soil, this method will create a loose-draining area surrounded by a wall of clay. The amended area will act like a sump, drawing all the moisture that is trapped in the surrounding clay soil. Mix ½ native soils with ½ amendments.

Recommended Products:

1. Plant Starter: use on all new plantings to reduce transplanting shock and to get the plant off to a good start.
2. Granule fertilizers: to feed your plantings throughout the growing season.
3. Concern products: A great natural way to control insects and their damage.
4. SKH Planting Mix: Ideal for amending clay or stony garden soils. Use a 50% mixture with your garden soil.
5. Osmocote: A timed release fertilizer to add to your "heavy feeders" for better blooms. Use along with regular fertilizer.
6. Water Wand: Makes watering a pleasure. Be careful, though ... you could have so much fun that you over water. Use low pressure only.
7. Garden Books: A must for every gardener. Refer to them for specific watering, feeding, and growing requirements for perennials, shrubs, and trees, annuals and veggies.