



Be Green When You Garden

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Green Gardening:

- does not have to be expensive
- does not require a lot of gadgets
- requires us to re-evaluate our gardening practices

What practices need to be re-evaluated?

- Watering
- Plant selection
- Use of pesticides/fertilizers
- Mulching
- Lawn Care

Watering: Proper watering

Water conservation is a big part of a “green” garden. Changing our watering practices is key to conservation. Avoid sprinkling every day for a short time. This practice does not benefit the plant and it wastes water. Instead, water once a week for a longer period of time. This will insure deeper penetration of the water into the soil to really benefit the root system.

Watering: Tools and techniques

- **Soaker hoses** can deliver water right to the soil, with very little loss. Soaker hoses have the additional benefit of not wetting the leaves of the plants. Dry foliage is less likely to develop fungal diseases. Fewer fungal problems means reduced fungicide use (another way to help the environment).
- **Rain gardens** are designed to capture water and put it to good use, rather than allow it to run off into storm sewers. This is a more complex choice and will require some planning to implement. An internet search on ‘rain gardens’ will yield a wealth of information on this topic.
- **Rain barrels** conserve water flowing off the roof and into the downspouts. Capturing this water and using it in the garden later is a good way to conserve water and also minimize the amount of water that flows away into storm sewers. While simple to use, they must be used correctly to get the most benefit from them.
 - Capacity varies from 50 to 150 gallons.
 - One inch of rain on a 1000 square foot roof, may yield over 600 gallons of water
 - Rain barrels can be hooked together in a system to collect larger amounts of water.
 - Rain barrel should have an overflow port and hose that can direct excessive amounts of water from heavy rains away from the foundation of the house.
 - Rain barrels are heavy when full (maybe 500 pounds or more). They need to be on a level, secure surface.
 - Fine screening should be in place on any openings to prevent mosquito breeding.
 - Tight-fitting lid needed to keep children and animals out of the rain barrel.
 - The rain barrel will need to be winterized.
 - Rain barrel water should not be used for drinking. Water from the rain barrel can safely be used in the flower garden. If you are using the water in the vegetable garden, do not apply the water to the edible portion of the plant.

Plant selection and placement:

- ties in to water conservation. Use drought tolerant plants in dry areas; water lovers in wet sites
- reduces our reliance on pesticides. Select plants that are insect and disease resistant; choose plants that don't need to be fertilized as often also helps reduce the use of synthetic fertilizers.

Reduce pesticide/fertilizer use

- Consider the severity of the problem; if the plant is not in danger of dying, you may not want to use a pesticide at all.
- Spot treating can help stop pests without risking major contamination of the environment.
- Try non-chemical methods available to control the problem (traps, pruning out infested plant parts, insect barriers, hosing insects off your plants and good garden sanitation.)
- Consider using fertilizer more on an "as-needed" basis; spot treat the plants that may have higher fertilizer requirements or those that look like they are in need.
- Consider frequency; a good lawn can be maintained by using a time-release fertilizer once a year in May. Trees that are maturing may really only need fertilizer every 3 to 5 years.

Mulching: Why?

- Controls weeds
- Conserves soil moisture
- Reduces soil erosion
- Moderates soil temperatures
- Protects from mower damage

Mulching: synthetic vs organic

Synthetic mulches, such as various plastics and weed barriers can be very successful in suppressing weeds. However, over time, these products will start to deteriorate and will need to be replaced. This leaves us with something to throw away and send to the landfill.

All organic mulches have the benefit of filtering into the soil and improving it as they deteriorate. Therefore, they provide us with suppression of weeds, soil improvement over time and no garbage to discard.

Lawn Care: Practices

- avoid incorrect watering
- avoid incorrect fertilizing
- when using pesticides consider what is really needed
- follow proper guidelines for watering, mowing and aerating to produce a thick healthy lawn

Lawn Care: the mower

- Avoid spilling gasoline when filling the mower.
- Provide proper maintenance for your mower including periodic tune-ups.
- Consider an electric mower or even a reel-type (push) mower.
- Reduce pollution from the lawn mower by reducing mowing time (decrease the size of the lawn or turn lawn areas into flower beds that won't require any mowing.)

Composting

Needs:

- Balanced amounts of carbon and nitrogen
- Micro-organisms (bacteria and fungi)
- Surface area (shred and chop to get more)
- Moisture and air (both needed by micro-organisms)
- Proper volume (minimum 3' wide by 3' high by 3' long)