

The 6 Most Common Gardening Mistakes New Gardeners Make

There is nothing more exhilarating than that excitement that a new gardener displays.

Take a few moments and think back to when you first decided to have your very own garden. There was nothing that was going to get in your way to having your very own bountiful supply of every vegetable that you could imagine, and you did it all yourself.

Right? We all felt this way when we started our journey to produce our own food – at least on some scale.

We often get questions from both seasoned and newbie gardeners about how to create the ‘perfect’ garden. The first thing that we tell everyone – there is no such thing as a perfect garden.



One of our experiments that turned out great last year – our heirloom Chinese peppers

The real key is to understand that every year is an experiment, and to embrace the harvest and what you learn from the previous year’s adventure. What worked last year, will not necessarily work this year.

However, with every year of gardening, we continue to learn from what Mother Nature decides for us, what the soil tells us, and what the crops provide for us.

If we could go back in time and start over with our first garden, we would almost be guaranteed to have a more productive and satisfying experience. As with any new adventure, we learn from what we experience, and from what other's can teach us.

There are a few common mistakes that new gardeners tend to make, and we hope that this post will help you on your journey to a successful garden season – whether that is measured in terms of a bountiful harvest, or a better understanding of your gardening experience.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION:



Tomatoes need lots of sun to reach their peak – so avoid planting in shady areas

We have all seen the tags in the nursery that provides us with the sun/shade requirement. Just because we find them in a 'shaded' area in the greenhouse, don't expect that you can plant a sun required plant in a partially shaded area.

Sure, your plant will live for a while, but your will have late and fewer blooms than you anticipated and you will become very frustrated about the size of your vegetables. Pay attention to the sun exposure recommendations for what you are planting, and plant accordingly.

SOIL PREPARATION:



Soil preparation is one of the keys to a great garden

Soil preparation is the key to a good garden! As most of you know – we do not use a rototiller in our garden – in fact, we do not even own one!

No matter what you work your ground with – make sure that the soil is not too wet when you first turn it over. Wet soil will lead to clumpy soil – which keeps plants from expanding their roots – and absorbing valuable nutrients.

Be sure to add lots of organic matter to your soil – compost and shredded leaves are excellent choices!

Another great practice when gardening is to use cover crops or green manure crops – a valuable way to bring back nutrients and structure to your soil each fall and spring. Good soil = healthy plants!

MULCHING:



Once they are established, mulching is the better option than tilling between rows. Here carrots benefit from straw mulch – keeping in moisture and keeping back weeds

No, this isn't only for your flower beds. Mulching with an organic material such as straw, leaves, grass clippings, etc. does several things.

It allows the moisture to remain in the soil where you need it and keeps the root area of your plant cooler, causing less stress on the plant. It also decreases the amount of weed growth in the area which will compete with the water and nutrients in the soil, not to mention – less weeding on the gardener.

And as a bonus, as the mulch breaks down, it continues to add organic material to the soil, providing additional nutrients that the soil becomes robbed of during growing season. A layer of mulch 2-3 inches deep is recommended around your plants.

WATERING:



A green bell pepper glistens after a rain in the garden. The right amount of water is critical to a plant's success.

Many new gardeners tend to kill new plants by either drowning them with too much water, or too little. There are a couple of quick hints to make sure you are watering correctly.

Know your plant's moisture requirements. The general rule of thumb is that most plants need about one inch of water per week.

It is typically better to water a little deeper every few days rather than to water a little every day. This allows your roots to dig down further in the soil and build a stronger base.

Get to know your plants and research what type of moisture that they require – and don't feel the need to get that hose out every day!

FERTILIZING:



Compost Tea: You can make your own organic fertilizer simply by steeping water in fresh compost!

Again, this is either a too much, or too little problem. Many people start out thinking that if you fertilize once, that more must be better, right? Wrong!

Whether you choose natural or synthetic fertilizers – more isn't necessarily better. Although it's harder to go overboard with natural compost tea, it is possible to provide too much fertilizer, and it is very easy to provide excessive fertilizer treatments using the 'Miracle-Gro' methods.

Too much fertilizer can cause fast growth that causes spindly cores to develop and an excessive amount of foliage – all with little vegetable production. This lack of skeletal strength will cause the plant to not support the growth later in the season.

Too much fertilizer can also lead to an increase in pest and disease issues.

Make sure you know the type and amount of fertilizer that your plant needs. If you are starting out with no compost – you can make a great fertilizer tea from a purchased bag of worm castings. They are an incredible all-natural fertilizer.

PLANTING WHAT YOU EAT:



Plant what you eat! We love peppers, tomatoes, garlic and onions – so we plant lots of them!

Brand new gardener's want to plant every vegetable that they have ever eaten – and many that they haven't.

Start off with a few vegetables, and know how much produce each plant will provide. Learn from your neighbors and local greenhouses about what grows well in your area/zone.

If you plant too many or too much, you will not only be spending an excessive amount of time in the garden, but also inundated with produce. Then the next problem will arise – what in the world will I do with all of these tomatoes, etc...

We should add this as number one, but the most disheartening mistake that a new gardener can make is to not try and give up.

One gardening season is not enough to determine if you have succeeded or failed. There hasn't been a year yet that we knew exactly what we would get out of our own garden.

And yes, every year we are faced with an unexpected pest and become part time scientists trying to figure out how to naturally get rid of them.

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