

50 Tips, Tricks, Hints & Facts for Natural Gardening

by Kristine Blake

Used by permission from The Greenhouse Catalog at

www.greenhousecatalog.com

1. Pest management begins with healthy soil. It produces healthy plants, which are better able to withstand disease and insect damage.
2. Organic fertilizers are safer than chemicals. Chemical fertilizers may, in time, build up salts.
3. Apply compost to your garden about two to four weeks before you plant, giving the compost time to integrate and stabilize within the soil.
4. New beds need soil amendments and double digging for that extra starting kick.
5. Soak finished compost in water to "brew" compost "tea," a nutrient-rich liquid that can be used for foliar feeding or for watering plants in your garden, backyard, or houseplants.
6. Specimen plants which need a warmer climate zone than you have do well in sheltered, south-facing walls. The wall acts as a solar collector, absorbing heat during the day and releasing it at night, creating a small zone that is warmer than the rest of the garden.
7. Begin deep watering your trees and shrubs in the spring if you don't get a soaking rain every 10 - 14 days.
8. Outdoor potted plants and baskets are the only plants that need daily water on the hottest, driest days of the summer.
9. Once a seed sprouts it must be kept watered. If it dries out, it dies. If seeds are lightly covered with soil, they may need to be gently sprinkled with water once or twice a day to keep them moist.
10. When planting in clay soil, cover seeds with vermiculite instead of clay. Clay absorbs heat and may bake the seeds and stop germination. Clay also forms a top crust, forming a barrier for the young seedlings.
11. Throw a handful of finished compost in the hole for a flower or vegetable transplant before transplanting. The compost gives the transplant a bit of an extra boost that lasts throughout the season.
12. Check moisture in container plants often with your fingers. Potting soil is often lightweight and dries out quickly.

13. Short on space but like vining vegetables? Train your squash, melons, and cucumbers onto a vertical trellis. Support the fruiting vines gently and thoroughly.
14. Watering is necessary when transplanting, but be careful not to over water.
15. Water your gardens and plants in the early morning or dusk to save water. Watering during the heat of the day burns plants and increases evaporation and loss of water.
16. Picking off flowers frequently encourages most annuals to flower more abundantly.
17. To continue blooming, container plants need large amounts of nutrients and water. Since water tends to wash out the nutrients, use finished compost or a good organic fertilizer as top-dressing.
18. Whenever possible use natural and organic fertilizers such as compost. Chemicals build up toxicity in soil, which leaches into drinking water.
19. Botanical insecticides are plant derivatives, and can be more toxic than some synthetics. They are, however, better in the long run because they break down rapidly and do not accumulate in the food chain as synthetics do.
20. Morning sun is more beneficial than afternoon sun.
21. Fertilize before a rain whenever possible.
22. Transplant seedlings to larger containers after they have grown 2 pairs of leaves.
23. Don't use garden soil as potting soil in containers. Its quality and texture is variable; it may drain poorly or be too loose and drain too quickly. It is also more likely to contain diseases, weed seeds and insects.
24. When choosing plants for your yard or garden, analyze your specific sunlight, soil, and climate first. Choose plants accordingly.
25. Water well before and after applying mulch to give your landscaping a good beginning.
26. Use a color wheel to find neighbors and opposites. Begin with a color wheel to design a beautiful, purposeful garden. Avoid simply throwing colors together but put a little time into planning.
27. Soak bare root plants in water for several hours to prepare them for planting after their dehydration.

28. Prepare beds for annuals and small plants by working in plenty of organic material, layer mulch on top, then gently stick the transplants through mulch to the appropriate depth.
29. Garden hydrangeas' color can be manipulated with the soil pH. Pink and red hydrangeas turn blue and purple in acid soils, while blue hydrangeas turn pink in alkaline soils.
30. Late spring and early summer is the best time to side-dress with compost your rapidly growing plants. Gently scratch the compost into the soil, taking care to start it about an inch away from the stem.
31. Do not fertilize during the fall or the winter.
32. In general, thinner leaved plants need more water to stay alive, thicker leaved plants need less.
33. Beneficial insects are attracted to your garden by coreopsis, feverfew, and sweet alyssum.
34. Egg cartons make excellent seed starters. Punch a hole in the bottom for drainage, fill with potting soil, plant your seeds and watch them flourish!
35. Cinnamon makes an excellent natural fungicide. Mix in your potting soil when planting seeds to prevent damping off of the seedlings.
36. Compost is not a fertilizer. It builds up organic matter in the soil.
37. Coffee grounds make excellent mulch around acid-loving plants.
38. The longer the growing season, the more compost is needed in the soil. A longer growing season requires more nutrients and organic matter in the soil.
39. Mulch prevents weeds.
40. Use newspapers as weed barriers when creating a new bed. They are printed with soy ink and decompose nicely, and are simple to lay out again when decomposed. Don't use slick colored advertisements or colored pages .
41. A five percent increase in organic material quadruples the soil's ability to store water. This is especially important information in dry climates.
42. Make compost tea by mixing equal parts compost and water and let it sit. Pour this liquid directly onto the soil around healthy, growing plants. Dilute this to 4 parts water to 1 part compost for use on smaller seedlings. Any compost that hasn't gone into solution can be used to make more tea or used in your garden.

43. Test any old seed you have stored by germinating it between moist paper towels. This saves precious time and effort.
44. Gently brush your hands across your tiny seedlings several times a day. This stimulates them to grow slightly slower, resulting in stronger, sturdier stems.
45. Control powdery mildew with milk. Dilute 1 part milk in 9 parts water and spray on the plants.
46. Cleanliness is absolutely necessary in gardens and greenhouses, especially when starting seeds. Clean your flats or pots with warm soapy water and sterilize before reusing.
47. Avoid using railroad ties in or around your vegetable garden; the chemicals used as preservatives are now thought to be toxic and harmful.
48. Caffeine is a natural herbicide. Tea and coffee grounds make excellent compost, but don't add too much.
49. Keep dirt out from under your fingernails by scratching a bar of soap before beginning. When you're finished, wash your hands thoroughly. The soap will wash cleanly out of your nails.
50. Less than 2 percent of the insects in the world are harmful. Most are beneficial.