

Gardening myths, mistakes and misunderstandings

We let garden myths, mistakes and superstition waste our time or harm our plants and trees, some of these mistakes are caused by inaccurate or outdated information, a lot of them are assumptions; something that is accepted as true without any proof. The assumption that plants and people are similar organisms is responsible for many myths. That's the way 'it's always been done' or 'my father/mother/the lady down the street etc always did it this way' or similar reasoning doesn't mean these ideas have ever been evaluated.

The problem – they often steer us away from simpler and easier methods of working.

Especially for garden beginners some of these ideas can create lots of problems.

Sometimes garden myths can be quite amusing, others are just plain wrong or at least misleading. For some of my favourites read on!

Myth 1. A tree branch that is 2 feet off the ground this year will move higher up the trunk as the tree grows; this statement is just wrong, trees only grow from the branch ends, however human trunks or legs do grow-so your arms are higher off the ground when you are 10 years old than when you are 2 years old.

Myth 2. Watering in sunlight damages leaves; a pervasive myth, science says 'No' and common sense should tell you the same thing, if this were true every time we have a summer thunderstorm and then brilliant sun our plants would be damaged, farmers would not be able to irrigate their crops without damaging them. Water droplets on a leaf do not focus the sun's rays. The main reason for not watering in the heat of the day is because it is a very inefficient use of water; the water evaporates quickly from the soil surface before it has a chance to be absorbed by the plants.

Myth 3. Add sand to clay soils to improve them; this is a good way to create concrete in your garden, sand added to clay soils binds the particles together making things worse not better. Adding organic matter, such as peat moss, compost, or well-rotted manure, is the best way to improve clay soils.

Myth 4. Paint all pruning wounds with tree paint; this idea is based on a human comparison, we put bandages etc on cuts, trees don't heal the way we do, they isolate the damaged area and bypass it, they don't grow new bark the way we grow new skin. Research has shown that the trees recover from pruning and wounds much better without our help. Tree paints and dressings are not necessary and can cause problems, they can seal in moisture and disease, and they prevent the tree from closing off the damaged area.

Myth 5. Newly planted trees should be pruned to offset any root loss; is a bad idea, it decreases the trees ability to create the food and growth substances necessary to produce new roots at exactly the time the tree needs it the most.

Myth 6. It's okay to ignore plant labels; the information is very important, it tells you how big the plant will get, how much sun, shade, or water is needed. It will also tell you if a particular soil type is necessary. It should be obvious that planting a tree that will grow to 25 feet tall and wide in the space between the front door and garage is a mistake, it is equally obvious that people ignore this valuable information, all you have to do is take a stroll around your neighbourhood. We would never buy a puppy without knowing if it was a St Bernard or a Chihuahua. The wrong location for a tree, shrub or plant can mean many hours spent trying to control the ultimate size. It often means poor health, appearance and ultimate death of the plant. Most of us have limited time and money to spend on our gardens. Bad choices mean wasted time and money.

From the Streetsville Horticultural Society newsletter November 2015

If you have garden questions please contact us at streetsvillehort@hotmail.com check out our website at www.streetsvillehort.ca