

The Art of Gardening

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Mindful gardeners always have something to do. It might seem that a summer garden is only active for a few weeks, but actually the garden's life cycle extends from late winter through early fall. Even in the cold, frozen days of winter, many gardeners begin nurturing tiny seeds, propping them by windows and keeping them warm with lamps.

The life and growth of a summer garden is a story that begins with the seeds of January and February and climaxes with the fruits of July and August. The success of the garden depends heavily upon timing and regular maintenance.

Once the garden plot is prepared, the garden does best if planted after the last frost of the spring and 60 to 80 days before the harvest. Along the way there is watering, weeding, staking, mulching, and picking. Seasonal changes, plant life cycles, and the work of the gardener transform the garden over time.

For many people, growing a vegetable garden is more than a hobby. It is a passion. They love to watch the first sprouts in spring and feast on the last harvest of fall. They enjoy the bounty in their freezers and pantries all year long. The rewards of gardening are on the table and in the experience.

Gardeners are immersed in the life cycles of plants. Successful development from seed to plant to produce depends on the work of the gardener. Drought, weeds, insects, and animals destroy garden plants. Watering, weeding, and using specific techniques make all the difference in gardening success.

No garden thrives without the careful attention of humans. Even where there has been a lush garden previously, few plants will sprout on their own. A gardener must plan the garden layout with proper spacing for all plants and placing seeds or transplants in the best locations. Weeds will grow with the same vigor as plants unless controlled. Most plants will sprawl out in a spindly mess unless cultivated with stakes, netting, or structures. Tomato plants, for example, do not grow as tall or produce as many tomatoes unless a stake or structure holds them up to the sun.

Several methods can be used to foster growth and save time in the garden. They include applying compost as mulch to add nutrients to the soil and help it retain moisture; placing rain barrels close to the garden for a ready source of water; and using stakes, fences, and other structures to increase plant growth and limit animal access.

Much can be learned about ecosystems through school or backyard gardening, which brings together plants, microbes, animals, and people, all living organisms with diverse needs, and non-living components such as weather, water, air, and soil.

Discussion Questions

How do different organisms (plants, humans, other animals) compete and interact in a garden?

- People to take care of it
 - Help maintain good soil
 - Mulch, Straw, grass clippings, weeds
 - Left alone, a garden is conquered by weeds bugs and plants wither from drought, become rabbits salad bar
 - Be mindful of water
 - Thirsty plants look shriveled
 - Too much water equals yellow leaves
 - Sprinkler early morning prevent disease
 - Water directly at stem
 - Watering systems Milk Carton
 - Provide stability for plants

Why are weeds such a problem in gardens?

- To many weeds rob soil of nutrients
- Weeds can also be beneficial, however, in creating valleys for water and insects with their root systems

What can you do to prevent weeds from growing in a garden?

- Mulch, a weed barrier that holds moisture

How does the decomposed matter in compost benefit plants?

- Compost adds nutrients

Taking Care of your garden: Water, Weed, and Feed

- Water, place a marker at seed location to conserve water
- 8 to 10 hours of sunlight
- Nutrients (compost from the mindful gardeners)
- Provide netting for berries to protect from birds and some insects
- Flowers attract beneficial insects
- Picking ripe fruit = more energy for other veggies

Extension Questions

What makes up compost?

How can you make your own compost?

The Gardener's Poem

We save every shell, every peel.
We know it will make a great meal,
for the worms in the compost,
for the soil it's the utmost.
Trash for treasure is a great deal.
We plan and we plant, it's neat.
Laying out garden rows at our feet;
we put in the seed with compost for feed,
a sustainable plan that is sweet.
We water and weed, it is fun!
Helping healthy plants grow in the sun.
We use what we know to help the plants grow,
until the growing season is done.
From the bounty, we can, dry, and freeze.
Then we eat garden food as we please.
There isn't much waste .
There's plenty to taste,
so please pass the carrots and peas.
We work for our food, it's true
It's just what we gardeners do.
We take a stand with a spade in one hand
to raise our own pizza or stew.