

# 10 Tips for Healthy Plants

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1. Add a 1" layer of compost to your gardens at least once a year. Compost is full of beneficial microbes that break down organic matter, which in turn improves soil conditions. Compost also attracts earthworms, improves drainage and the overall nutritional value of your soil. I like to spread my compost in the fall when it's plentiful, but anytime is fine.
2. Add a 3"-4" layer of organic mulch to your gardens once a year. Mulch suppresses weeds and adds organic matter to the soil as it breaks down. Mulch can be in the form of grass clippings, shredded wood, dried leaves, straw or even pine needles. Keep the mulch away from the stem or crown of your plants to help prevent rot.
3. Place 4 to 6 sheets of black and white newspaper under your mulch once a year to prevent weed seeds from germinating. The newspaper will breakdown over time and add organic matter to the soil and help your mulch to work better by preventing the sun from germinating the seeds below. Stay away from the shiny ads as they do not break down as easily and the inks may not be good for the soil. Brown paper bags and brown corrugated cardboard can also be used in place of the newspaper.
4. Switch from synthetic fertilizers to organic fertilizers such as bone meal, blood meal, fish emulsion, compost teas or alfalfa tea. Synthetic fertilizers can build up salts in the soil and can actually be harmful to beneficial microbes and wildlife when used over a long period of time. There is also a higher risk of "burning" your plants when using synthetic fertilizers. Espoma carries a line of organic fertilizers as well, but many plants don't even need additional fertilizers when you apply a yearly dose of compost to the surrounding plants.
5. Make sure your lawn and gardens get at least 1" of water a week for optimal growth. The exception to this rule would be if you have established drought tolerant plants, thirsty roses or grow mainly in containers (containers may need to be watered daily). Check your specific plant care instructions for more information, but in general 1" of water per week is sufficient.
6. Keep weeds at a minimum in your garden to ensure optimal plant growth. Weeds will compete with your flowering plants for water, light and nutrients. Pulling weeds the day after a soaking rain makes the job easier.
7. Give plants ample room to grow, taking into account their mature size when first putting them in the ground. Doing so, will improve air circulation around the plants, which reduces pest and disease problems. It also keeps you from having to prune all the time or constantly move plants when they have gotten too big for their location.
8. Use the winter months to research plants you'd like to grow in your gardens. The more you know about a plant, the easier it will be to care for it once you have it in your gardens. Remember, knowledge is power....comy I know, but it applies to a lot of things.
9. Encourage birds, butterflies and beneficial insects to come to your yard by not using herbicides or synthetic fertilizers. These creatures will help reduce any pest problems you may have.
10. If you do have a pest problem, try the least offensive method of removal first, such as hand picking, a sharp blast from the hose or a mild insecticidal soap before resorting to harsh chemicals. Many times, the plant can withstand quite a bit of damage before showing signs of stress, and nothing needs to be done. Keep in mind that unhealthy or stressed plants attract problem insects and that a healthy soil encourages healthy plants.