

GARDEN MYTHS DEBUNKED



Gardeners often rely on misguided advice offered from well-meaning folks that are more of a hindrance than a help.

Here are a few garden myths that might make you think twice.

MYTH: Planting a pollinator garden will increase my chances of being stung.

FACT: Bees that are foraging for nectar and pollen are generally too focused on their task to bother with humans. Also, most native bees are either too small to sting, or they are solitary and have no reason to sting. Most of our native bees do not even have stingers and, even if they do, those stingers are so small you wouldn't even feel it. Only female bees are capable of stinging.

MYTH: Drought tolerant plants don't need to be watered.

FACT: Even the most drought-tolerant plants need to be watered at least the first year they are planted. Tough, drought-tolerant native plants can live through long, hot summers, but first they're going to need additional water to get their roots established. Provide a deep soaking every few days dependent upon the weather. Leaf or bark mulch will help retain moisture. Drought-tolerant does not mean drought-proof.

MYTH: I am allergic to goldenrod.

FACT: There are over 75 species of goldenrod and 20 species of ragweed that are native to the U.S. If you are prone to fall allergies, it is ragweed and not goldenrod that is causing you to sneeze. One reason for the confusion might be that both plants bloom around the same time though they do not look alike.

Goldenrod is a beneficial pollinator plant. Unlike ragweed that has smaller, lighter pollen grains that blow in the wind, goldenrod pollen grains are large and are ONLY transported by insect pollinators. Realizing that a single ragweed plant can produce over a billion grains of lighter-than-air pollen explains the real cause of seasonal allergic reactions.

MYTH: That Native Plant in My Yard is Invasive

FACT: Native plants occur naturally in a specific region without human intervention. They are adapted to local environments and are important to that ecosystem. Conversely, an invasive plant is defined as a non-native species "whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm." Non-native plants that out-compete native plants are considered "invasive".

There are conditions under which even native plants may spread widely and take over such as fast-growing goldenrod, aster or milkweed plants. You may want to remove or share some of these plants to keep a diverse selection of plants. These same plants in a meadow are just a natural part of the native landscape. Planting a variety of native species will ensure you have a garden that enhances the local ecosystem and supports wildlife.

MYTH: Organic pesticides are safe to use.

FACT: Many gardeners believe that if a pesticide is labeled “organic”, it’s automatically safe for humans, pets, and the environment. This misconception can lead to overuse or misuse.

Organic pesticides are derived from natural sources like plants, minerals, or microbes but it’s important to understand the impact of the ingredients in the formula. For example, a simple solution of castile soap and distilled water (insecticidal soap) is a safe, effective organic insecticide that has minimal negative impact. However, the insecticide pyrethrum, derived from chrysanthemums, is organic and natural and yet is very toxic to bees and other insects. Bottom line, read the labels, use pesticides minimally and apply them later in the day when bees and other pollinators are less active.

As gardeners and stewards of our beautiful, delicate earth we should all take the time to question, research and share the truth. Focusing on the real facts about how nature works in our own backyard gardens can help us feel more confident in our ability to maintain a healthy and ecologically sound world.