

The Gardener's Secret Handbook

-by **Michael J. McGroarty** of
<http://freeplants.com>

The purpose of this little Ebook:

Gardening is an incredible joy, and the more successful you are as a gardener, the more enjoyable gardening becomes. I'm here to tell you that gardening is nowhere near as complicated as some people seem to make it.

Through the pages of this little Ebook, I hope to transfer from my hand to yours my simple techniques for incredible gardening success.

-Mike McGroarty

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Gardening Notes

Good Dirt, Bad Dirt . . . What a Rookie Dirtologist Should Know

I get hollered at a lot via Email for referring to the precious soil of this earth as dirt. Nobody has a better appreciation for good soil than I do, but I also like to let my hair down (what I have left) and speak to folks in terms that make them comfortable. So cut me a little slack, I'm far from perfect and too old to change now.

Good soil is essential to happy, healthy plants and a beautiful landscape. If you have really good soil at your house, consider yourself extra lucky. A lot of people have to deal with really poor soil around their homes. Heavy clay soil is probably the worst type of soil for plants. It contains very little organic matter, and does not drain well at all.

All plants need water, but most landscape plants do not tolerate excessive amounts of water very well at all. Therefore, before you begin installing plantings around your home your first order of business is to create planting beds that will drain well and not stay soggy all the time.

Some folks try to accomplish this by just roto-tilling and amending the soil they have with all kinds of additives like peat moss and the like. Or they excavate out 6" of clay soil and replace it with good topsoil. This seems like a good idea, but in reality it just doesn't work.

Keep in mind, clay soil does not drain well at all. When you excavate out an area you are actually creating a retention pond that will hold water for a very long time after a rain. When you fill this excavated area with good topsoil, the retention pond is still there because the good topsoil is porous and will allow the rain water to run through it, but there is nowhere for the water to go because the good soil is completely surrounded by clay soil.

The only workable solution is to raise your planting beds with good rich topsoil that is placed on top of the clay soil. There are multiple benefits to creating raised beds. One, the soil drains better and the plants will thrive. And because the beds are raised, your plantings will show up better from a distance, and overall your landscaping will look better.

Don't skip this part about raising your planting beds. It is the

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single most important thing you can do to make your landscaping look nice. If you're on a tight budget spend all of your money on topsoil and just build your planting beds. Then you can add the plants as you can afford to. Once you start planting you can not go back and add more soil to the beds without removing all of the trees and shrubs first.

Buying topsoil can be tricky. There's a lot of good topsoil out there, but there are also dealers who sell soil that I would not consider good soil at all. How do you know?

Many topsoil dealers screen their topsoil to remove all the sticks, stones, hubcaps and other junk that tends to be in topsoil harvested from urban areas. Screening is fine, it makes for really nice topsoil.

But some dealers have topsoil that actually has a heavy clay base and they shred the soil to make it nice and loose and more attractive to the buyer. You *do not want* topsoil that has to be shredded to make it loose because once it gets wet it will turn to mud, then when it dries it will get hard as rock.

How can you tell if topsoil contains a lot of clay?

Go to the stockyard where they actually process the soil. When you look at the pile of soil that has already been through the screener or shredder, scoop up a handful of soil. Examine it closely. Are the soil particles loose and fine? Or do you see little tiny balls of soil that can be smashed between your fingers?

Topsoil that is heavy in clay often comes out of the shredder in little tiny balls as I just described. You can actually see these little balls rolling down the pile of soil. That won't happen if you have good sandy loam topsoil.

Next look at the raw pile of topsoil, the pile of soil that has not been through the screener or shredder. Ignore the weeds, any pile of good rich topsoil should be covered with weeds unless they turn the pile often enough to keep it clean.

Look closely at the area from which they are removing soil from this pile of raw topsoil. Can you see marks in the pile where they have used the teeth of a backhoe to loosen the soil so they can remove it from the pile? If you can see those types of claw marks that indicates that the pile of soil is very hard and packed, which indicates heavy clay soil.

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On the other hand, if it looks as if they are just scooping soil out of the raw pile easily with a front-end loader, then chances are it's good topsoil.

See? Now you're a dirtologist!

“He said, she said.” A Landscape You'll Both Love

In my mind landscaping is never permanent. I'm always moving this or moving that, or adding something new. And when you have planting beds that are raised with good rich soil, moving plants around is easy. Just make sure you do it at the correct time of year. We'll chat about transplanting tips a little later in this book.

Landscape design is actually pretty simple. The more you know about the plants you buy, the better designer you will be. Don't get all caught up in that fancy shmancy stuff they teach in those landscape design books. It's much more simple than that.

For the most part, almost all plants like sun, and some plants tolerate shade better than others. North-south, east-west never meant a lot to me when I was designing landscapes for the 500 some homes that I've landscaped over the years. And I guess I should point out that the plants did just fine, and my customers loved their landscapes. So please keep it simple and you'll probably stay married.

When designing your landscape, look at it like the staircase in the first Rocky movie. The landscape plants are the steps to your home. The first step is your lawn. The second step is the mulch or soil in your beds. Yes, I consider mulch or soil part of the design because contrast is really important in a good landscape design, and the brown color of the mulch or the soil contrasts nicely against many of the plants in your landscape.

“Educated” landscape designers will argue with me about that last statement, but over the years I've found what people like, not what the book says. Most people like color and contrast.

The third step in your landscape would be a very low growing ground-hugging plant like Blue Rug Juniper or Green Mound

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Juniper. The fourth step would be something a little higher, like evergreen azaleas, Blue Boy, Blue Girl Holly, or any intermediate type shrub.

The fifth step would be something that will be just a little taller than what you use in step four. If you use evergreen Azaleas in step four, then you could use Rhododendrons in step five, just behind the azaleas. Just use less of them. Two or four in each setting is usually plenty.

Step six would actually be the upright specimen plants that you might use on the corner of the house or on the corner of the sidewalk. Something like Japanese Red Maple, Weeping Japanese Red Maple, Flowering Dogwood, or Canadian Hemlock.

Use a combination of colors and textures in your landscape but try and keep the colors somewhat organized. Coarse textured plants have larger leaves and are more airy, you can see through, or into the plant. A coarse textured plant would be something like a Rhododendron or Leatherleaf Viburnum with their larger leaves. Finer textured plants are things like Junipers, Taxus, and Spirea with their small leaves or needles and compact appearance.

Group your colors together. Whatever you do don't alternate colors, which is what a lot of people like to do. I say this for two reasons. One, different colored plants grow differently and they will never grow in unison like they would need to if alternated. The other reason is that it just doesn't look as nice as it will if you group the colors.

For instance, Gold Thread Cypress is bright yellow and can really spruce up a landscape if used sparingly. I like to use three of them together on a corner planting, then put something dark green behind them to really bring out the color. But be content to use just three of them, and in just one area of your landscape. Trust me, they'll look nice if you use fewer of them. Some people buy a dozen and splatter them all over the landscape and they completely lose their effectiveness.

You'll find some photos of some of my designs and landscapes on my website. <http://freeplants.com>

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“I'm in Love with My Compost Bin!”

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Sounds like an episode of the Jerry Springer show, doesn't it? But the truth is I started composting out of necessity because I needed a way to get rid of the large amount of organic waste that my yard and backyard nursery produced each year.

So I built three compost bins which you can see photos of on my website. I'd fill one bin to overflowing, then the next, and the next. When all three were completely full I'd go back to the first bin and empty the contents onto my potting soil pile.

Keep in mind, I never turn the material in my compost bins. I just put the material in the bin and let nature take over. When I empty the bin the material isn't always broken down to the black powder you see on those TV commercials for those compost tumblers, but it is broken down enough to be added to my potting soil pile, and from there it breaks down the rest of the way.

I've also emptied my compost bin directly into a raised bed, putting the material from my compost bin on the bottom of the bed, and using better soil on top of the compost. But I can assure you, shortly after this compost is added to the bottom of a raised bed it will break down completely in no time at all.

Or you can just build a raised bed with the material from your compost bin and just let it set for one season before you plant in it. You might not even have to wait. It just depends on what you put in your compost bin and how well it breaks down.

But the most important thing is to not turn a very positive thing like composting into a very negative thing like excessive work by turning the material in the bin when you really don't need to.

Have you ever seen Mother Nature turn compost? Nope, she just puts it on the ground and lets it rot. And nobody knows more about making good rich topsoil than Mother Nature!

Notice how I do as little work as possible when I garden? Is that because I'm lazy? Could be. Could be that I have a weak back and I try and use it as wisely as I can. Or it could be that I value my time very highly and want to use it for the most productive activity that I can. How about that?

At any rate, for reasons that I can not find the words to explain, I get an incredible amount of joy out of composting! I don't

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know why, I just do. Give it a try. When you empty that bin you'll think of me and say to yourself; "Wow! Making my own super rich growing soil is really cool!"

Your neighbors will think you're a little wacky, but you and I know who the wacky one is, don't we?

How would you like the plans for a really simple composting bin? Here ya go:

Go to the hardware store and buy a piece of 36" wire fence about 18 feet long and a piece of wire the same gauge as the fence. Just stand the fence up and pull the ends together until it makes a circle and use the wire to fasten the ends of the fence together. Presto! You now have a compost bin. Start fillin' 'er up!

Weeds! They ain't as tough as you think

Some people spend what seems like their whole life trying to get ahead of the weeds in their planting beds and never do get them under control. It's really not that difficult.

Weeds are living, breathing plants. They need three things to survive and thrive; water, sunlight, and nutrition. Hopefully your planting beds contain soil that is high in nutrition. Your plants depend on it, and therefore the weeds will thrive. And hopefully Mother Nature will send you just the right amount of nitrogen-rich rainfall so your plants will thrive. But so will the weeds.

So that leaves us just one thing that we can deprive the weeds of to keep them out of your planting beds. Sunlight. Weeds need sunlight. If we can make sure they don't get an adequate amount of sunlight, we can minimize, if not almost completely eliminate them.

But first, let's start with some simple cultivation to eliminate as many of the existing weeds and roots of weeds that we can. You can pull any and all weeds that you see in your beds. Or if you have a lot of open spaces in your beds you can turn the soil by hand, turning the weeds with it.

Or you can use a small roto-tiller to turn the soil. Yes, the roto-

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tiller will chop up the weeds which could result in actually propagating the weeds, but the secret is to keep working the soil over and over, eventually causing all parts of the weed plants to dry out and completely die.

Till the soil, wait a few days and allow the soil near the surface to dry out completely, then till again. Just keep doing this over and over, utilizing the heat from the sun to dry out and break up the tissue of the weed plants. Eventually you will see no sign of those weeds.

But the soil is loaded with weed seeds and if you don't take some kind of precautions you will soon have more weeds than you started with. You can keep the weed seeds at bay by turning the soil every few days. Just as the seeds start to germinate, you turn the soil, which will kill the newly germinated weed. But the wind is always carrying in fresh seeds so you will never reach a point where you can quit working the soil.

The better option is to cover the soil with a mulch-like material which will block the sunlight from getting to the weed seeds and greatly reduce the chances of the seeds germinating. Around here (Ohio) we use shredded hardwood bark mulch which works great. But remember what you just learned about composting.

The mulch will compost itself and eventually become super rich growing soil that weeds will thrive in. So you always have to add more mulch to any open bed areas to keep the weeds down. Of course the more plants you have in the bed the less sunlight will reach the soil and that will greatly help to control weeds as well.

I know what you're thinking!

You're thinking about that black fabric material they sell to control weeds in your flower beds. Or black plastic. Two things you need to understand. First of all, neither of those things works for very long. Secondly, please don't put anything in your beds that doesn't rot. It will haunt you forever.

The reason those things don't work is because they are ugly, so you have to cover them with mulch so your beds look natural again. Remember the composting lesson. The mulch that you place over top of the weed barrier material will rot and turn into fantastic topsoil that will grow weeds like nobody's business!

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That means that weeds will now be growing on top of the weed barrier junk, and the roots of the weeds will grow through the weed barrier into the soil below. Then when you go to remove the weed barrier you won't be able to get it up because it is now anchored down by the weeds that are growing on top of it!

Trust me, I'm not making this up.

Keep in mind I've landscaped hundreds and hundreds of homes and we've had to often go in and pick up where the homeowner left off before he got so frustrated that he called me. We've pulled up miles of weed barrier material as well as miles of that plastic edging that never seems to stay in place like it's supposed to. And pulling that stuff up is hard work.

Save yourself the trouble and don't use it. You don't need plastic edging around your beds. Just cut a nice neat edge with your spade and be done with it. Then you can change the bed shape as the plants grow or as your heart desires. Trust me, you'll need to change it eventually. Keep things simple, life is too short to work that hard for no good reason.

Teach Your Kids What Every Person Should Know about Planting Trees and Shrubs

Boy, this is a heartbreaker.

I've seen so many people spend their hard-earned money on beautiful trees and shrubs only to take them home and kill them because they either didn't know how to plant them, or worse yet, they followed the advice of some self-proclaimed expert who really didn't have a clue.

Rule number one. Trees and shrubs breathe just like you and I. But they breathe through their roots, not their branches. So if you plant them too deep, they can't breathe and they die. Or if you plant them in a really wet area they suffocate and die.

Or if you have clay soil and you go to a lot of trouble thinking you are doing all the right things when you dig and prepare the planting hole, when in fact you might be creating a bathtub for your plant to drown in.

First let's look at planting depth. If you have good, well drained

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soil at your house you can install your plants at the same depth they were growing in the nursery. But . . . you really should be putting them in a raised bed as we discussed earlier.

When a nurseryman digs a balled in burlap tree the top of the root ball is exactly where the top of the soil was in the nursery. So if your soil is well drained you could plant the tree with the top of the root ball flush with the ground. But to me that's playing a dangerous game, so I always like to install my plants a little higher than grade and mound the soil up over the root ball. That way I know the plant will be able to breathe just fine.

Do the same thing for shrubs, and plants grown in containers. Always plant them a little high and mound the soil up over the root ball.

If you have heavy clay soil it is absolutely essential that you raise the planting bed with good rich topsoil before you install any plants. At least ten inches of soil should be used, if not more. Then install your plants as I described earlier and they should do just fine. Plants need water, but too much water around the roots will kill them. So even after you plant them make sure you water them as needed, but by all means do not over water them.

Sometimes you're faced with the situation of having clay soil and trying to plant some trees out in the yard where it's just not practical to create a large raised bed. Some so-called experts will have you believe that all you need to do is dig the hole wider and deeper than the root ball of the tree you are planting and just fill around the tree with good rich organic matter.

That just does not work! What you are really doing is creating that bathtub effect that I mentioned earlier. You excavate out the clay soil and backfill with loose porous soil. Then as rain water runs across the ground during heavy rains the water can easily seep in around the root ball of your tree, but there is no way for it to get out.

Before the tree can use the water, or the water can evaporate, along comes another rain, filling the hole completely up once again. Your tree will never be able to tolerate this much water around its roots for extended periods of time and it will die due to a lack of oxygen to its root system.

So if you are forced to plant a tree in clay soil, you are better off

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to dig the hole just large enough for the root ball, and only dig it half as deep, leaving the tree considerably above grade. Then fill any voids around the part of the root ball that is below grade with the same clay soil you removed from the hole. That will help to keep water from seeping into the hole.

Then you can backfill around the exposed part of the root ball with good rich soil and place mulch over that. Make sure you use plenty of rich topsoil as you backfill around the top half of the root ball so the root ball is insulated from the sun. Don't pile the soil too high on the root ball, just make the bed larger around and only put a few inches of soil over the root ball.

The tree will be able to breathe and will eventually root into the poor soil. Keep in mind your tree is planted high and in periods of drought will need to be watered.

The Transplanting Secrets of a Plant Junkie!

Timing, timing, timing! Gardening success depends more on timing than any other factor. If you do the right thing at the correct time of the year it works almost perfectly. But when you ignore the rules of timing, your plants are in trouble, and you just might kill them.

For the discussion of transplanting let's group plants into two categories. Evergreens, which includes all needled evergreens as well as broadleaf evergreens like Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Euonymus, Boxwood and Piers Japonica. The second group would be deciduous plants, plants that lose their leaves during the winter.

The ideal time to transplant almost all plants is when the plants are completely dormant. Dormancy begins late in the fall after a hard freeze. Not a frost, but a hard freeze. A hard freeze occurs when the air temperature dips down below 32 degrees F. for a period of several hours. In most climates plants remain dormant until early spring when the temperatures start warming up.

Like I said, that's the ideal time to transplant almost all plants, but with deciduous plants it is essential that you transplant them during that period of dormancy.

In the spring when the plants start to get active again you can

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continue with your transplanting while the buds are forming and beginning to swell, but once the first leaves appear on the plants you can no longer safely transplant them.

Most evergreens like Taxus, Junipers and Arborvitae are a little different. As soon as they start to put on new growth in the spring you should not transplant them. But once that new growth hardens off it is safe to transplant some of these evergreens during the late summer and early fall. But to be safe, transplanting during the dormancy period is always a better bet.

Some perennials can be transplanted during the growing season, but not all of them. Which is why I prefer to tell people to transplant in late fall or early spring. It's hard to go wrong then.

Make sure you understand the difference between transplanting and just planting. If you buy a plant at the garden center and it's balled in burlap or in a container, the sooner you plant it in the ground the happier it will be. When you plant a tree or shrub you are not severing any roots, so there is no danger to the plant if you plant it during the summer months.

The risk to a plant occurs during the transplanting process when you sever large roots as you dig the plant out of its original location. When you are transplanting during the dormancy period it's alright to sever some roots. As long as you leave enough roots for the plant to survive, it's not going to hurt anything to sever roots during the digging process.

The rule of thumb is to make sure you have at least 12" of root ball for every one inch of caliper of the plant's main stem. The caliper of a tree is the diameter of the trunk of the tree, approximately six inches from the ground. Take, for instance, a small tree with a caliper of 1.5". The root ball on a tree that size should be 18" in diameter and 18" deep.

At <http://www.freeplants.com> you will find a web page that explains in detail, with photos, how to ball and burlap dig a plant.

Root Pruning Before Transplanting Makes a Difference

Huh? Whaddya mean, root pruning?

First a quick lesson in regular pruning. When you prune off the

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tip, or the terminal bud on any plant, the plant automatically senses a loss, and immediately starts the process of replacing the lost branch. But in most cases, when you cut off a single terminal bud, the plant will replace that bud with two or three buds. That's why the more you prune your plants, the fuller they get.

On the other hand, if you let any tree or shrub grow unpruned, the plant will often be very airy and not dense at all. Have you noticed how spindly plants are in the woods?

The roots of plants are no different. When left unpruned the roots just continue to grow in an outward direction, continually growing further and further away from the plant. This really doesn't bother the plant a lot because it still has an ample amount of roots. But when you go to transplant the tree or shrub you are going to sever a great deal of the root system since most of it lies outside of the area that you intend to move with the plant.

The solution is to root prune the plant one year before you intend to transplant it. Just take a regular digging spade and force it into the ground around the plant at the same distance away from the plant as if you were actually going to dig the tree or shrub. You should do this during the dormancy period since you will be severing roots.

What this does is force the tree to sense the loss of some roots, and the tree will immediately start the process of replacing those roots. But the new roots will be much closer to the base of the plant since that's where you actually made the cuts. This creates a much better root system for the plant, and when you transplant the tree or shrub a year later it will do much better because the plant will have more roots to take with it to its new home.

The new roots that are generated via root pruning are smaller, more fibrous roots, which have a much greater ability to pick up water and nutrients. That's why if you have a plant that isn't doing well in your landscape, root pruning will often revive the plant back to vigor.

In nurseries, when they grow small trees from seed they often use a small, bottomless container to start their seedlings. Seedlings often have one long tap root that tends to just keep growing deeper and deeper, and very few lateral or fibrous roots are produced. So what the nurseries do is place the bottomless con-

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tainers on a wire bench either outside or in a greenhouse.

As the seedlings grow, the tap root heads for the bottom of the container where it is exposed to the air. This exposure kills the tip of the tap root. The plant senses the loss of one of its roots and starts to produce more roots. As these new roots reach the bottom of the container the same thing happens, and before the end of the first growing season the little seedlings have massive root systems and when they are transplanted to the field the plants immediately establish themselves into their new surroundings and grow quite well. This simple concept revolutionized the production of tree seedlings.

And that's the advantage of root pruning. More fibrous roots that pick up nutrients better.

“Your Honor, All I Did was Prune the Shrubs Around the House!”

I can't even imagine how many arguments have started because somebody in the house grabbed the pruning shears and went out and did “a little trimming”. The arguments are often the result of a lack of knowledge about pruning. And in many cases it's both parties that have a lack of knowledge.

One person admits to not knowing how to prune but does it anyway, and the other person doesn't really know all there is to know about pruning which makes him or her nervous when their other half just trudges ahead and prunes anyway.

Today I am going to take the side of the person who trudges ahead and prunes even though they may not know exactly what they are doing. But I am also going to tell you why I am defending the “wild man” (or woman) with the shears.

Over the years I've landscaped somewhere around 500 homes, maybe more, and I'm sad to report that most of them look terrible today. Mostly from a lack of pruning, or a lack of pruning enough when it was needed. The homes that look the best are jobs that I designed for relatives, then kept on them, and educated them about pruning. Because my relatives took my advice and pruned hard when needed, and pruned as often as needed, their landscapes still look great today.

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This part is important, pay close attention to what I'm about to say here: Most people fail to prune their plants properly because they are always waiting for the ideal time to prune a particular plant. Then that ideal time comes along and they are not "in the mood for gardening".

There are times that are better for pruning certain plants, but in most cases it's not going to harm the plant to prune it out of season. Which is almost always better than not pruning at all, or waiting way too long to prune.

For instance, Rhododendrons and Azaleas should be pruned right after they bloom. But why? When you understand why a plant is best pruned at a certain time you then know what will happen if you prune it at a different time of the year.

Rhododendrons, Azaleas, and Dogwoods start producing flower buds the summer before they are to bloom again. For instance, white and pink Dogwoods bloom in the spring, and they also put on new growth in the spring. After the flowers are gone the plant starts making seeds with what's left of the flower bloom.

Once the plant stops growing, or at least slows way down, which is usually mid summer, flower buds for next season start to form. So if you prune once the flower buds have started to form you are going to cut off a lot of flower buds. That's why it's best to prune right after the plant blooms. At least that's the case with Dogwoods, Rhododendrons and Azaleas, to name a few.

But if you have plants that need pruning, and you missed that short window of time in the spring for ideal pruning, should you wait for the calendar to go around again?

Absolutely not.

That's exactly how people lose control of their landscapes. They are always waiting for the ideal time to prune, then they miss it when it comes around again, so they wait some more. Meanwhile the plant is becoming unsightly, and heavy pruning is in order. But most people don't have the courage to do heavy pruning, and thus their landscaping begins to look like a train wreck.

It is always best to do heavy pruning when the plant is dormant because heavy pruning is the equivalent of doing surgery on a

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human being. And you or I would not want to undergo surgery while we are awake, and neither do your plants. But light, or regular season pruning is fine to do anytime during the growing season. Even if it means whacking off a few flower buds.

Flowers are nice, but not at the expense of an ugly plant that is completely out of shape. If your plants need pruning, by all means prune them. They'll make beautiful flowers for you next year because of it.

Plants like Rhododendrons and Viburnum are the type of plants that people are never quite sure how to prune so they don't. And then they get really ugly. Do what I do. I grab the hedge shears and just whack away at all of my plants. And because of my relentless pruning all my plants grow nice and tight and full and bloom beautifully.

Plants have two types of buds. Terminal buds, which can be found right on the tip of a branch, and lateral buds which are found on the sides of a branch.

When you prune off a terminal bud the plant senses a loss and immediately starts to replace that bud. But the replacement buds will be lateral buds. So when you prune off a terminal bud the plant usually replaces that single bud with multiple lateral buds. Those buds grow into branches that produce more buds, and because of your pruning efforts the plant grows very tight and compact, which is more attractive than a tall and lanky plant.

Even Japanese Red Maples need regular pruning. Even the expensive Lace Leaf Weeping varieties. The more you prune and shape them the nicer they are. Left unpruned they get sparse and out of shape.

A bad pruning job is like a bad haircut. It will grow out!

The Secret Life of Fertilizer

The most important thing I can teach you about fertilizer is this:

“It ain't the magic dust people think it is!”

All fertilizer packages should have a set of numbers that look

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like this: 21-5-10. The first number is the percentage of nitrogen in the fertilizer, the second number is the percentage of phosphorous in the fertilizer, and the third number is the percentage of potash.

Nitrogen gives the plant good color and stimulates foliar growth, while phosphorous helps to produce an abundance of fruit or flowers. Potash helps build strong root systems.

A typical garden fertilizer would be 14-14-14 while a lawn fertilizer would be more like 26-5-5. Keep in mind, both garden plants and lawn grasses are very vigorous growers and have the ability to use larger amounts of nitrogen.

The trees and shrubs around your house do not grow that fast and can not use that much nitrogen. So if you apply too much nitrogen fertilizer to your landscape plants you will burn them up, and very possibly kill them.

So what kind of fertilizer should you use on the trees and shrubs around your house?

If you plant your landscape plants in raised beds of good rich topsoil as mentioned earlier, they shouldn't need any fertilizer. My landscaping is in raised beds but the soil is not rich at all, it's all sand and gravel, and in 16 years I have never fertilized the landscape plants around my house and they look great.

But if you feel compelled to fertilize your landscape plants just use something organic. The plants will love it, and it's difficult to over fertilize with organics. Just follow the instructions on the package.

There are also some really good slow release fertilizers on the market that work well. A good slow release fertilizer will release very slowly over a period of three to four months, where a typical garden fertilizer will release almost immediately the first time it gets wet.

But I still recommend good soil and organic fertilizers.

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Well, that concludes this little booklet. I hope you enjoyed it and maybe learned something about plants that you didn't know.

Now Email a copy to your gardening friends.
They'll love you for doing so!

Have a wonderful day!

-Mike McGroarty

[Http://www.freeplants.com](http://www.freeplants.com)

P.S. I'll leave you with one of my favorite quotes.

How far you go in life depends on you being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these. --George Washington Carver

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