

Tennessee Tree Day is March 16, 2024. To reserve your trees now through March 4th, go to: <https://www.tectn.org/tennesseetreeday.html>. The trees go fast, so reserve now.

Last Chance! The next University of Tennessee **Master Gardener class** at the Sullivan County Extension Office located at 140 Spurgeon Ln, Blountville, TN. starts on **January 30, 2024** and continues every Tuesday for 14 weeks from **10AM – 12noon**.

Call the Extension Office for information and application form. 423-574-1919

Garden Hits and Myths

By Kate O'Lenic, Master Gardener

The facts, ma'am, just the facts. As Master Gardeners, we are bound by our promise to provide scientific information when it comes to gardening advice. So, today, we are going to blow up some myths and give you the scoop on the proper ways (the hits) to help your garden and avoid doing something that may cause harm.

Myth: Stake newly planted trees. To develop a stable root system and a strong trunk, trees need to move with the wind. Therefore, staking should be avoided. The only time you may need to stake a tree is if it is a bare root and can't stand by itself or if it is planted in a place with very strong wind gusts. However, staking in these cases is done for a short time, generally one growing season. You also need to avoid harming the bark with materials that may rub. In some cases, you may just need to use braces across the ground to stabilize the root ball.

Myth: Paint tree or shrub cuts or wounds. Using products to seal a cut or wound can easily harm the plant. It can promote rotting. Plants have a method of healing themselves. There is no need to seal a wound or cut.

Myth: Add Epsom salts to soil. Magnesium supplements might be OK if you had a soil test that showed a deficiency. Follow the soil test recommendations for the amount to add. Otherwise, you can harm your plants with too much magnesium. There is no evidence that it aids seed germination, uptake of other nutrients or improves plant health or growth. In fact, too much magnesium can reduce calcium absorption and may worsen blossom rot on tomatoes rather than prevent it.

Myth: Keep the burlap on tree root balls when planting. Burlap needs to be removed so the roots can be inspected, and any defects addressed. Roots development may also be hindered by the soil and burlap.

Myth: Use coffee grounds to lower soil pH. Coffee grounds are great to add to the compost pile as a source of carbon and nitrogen. But they are poor at altering the soil pH. If your soil test recommends lowering the pH, elemental sulfur is a good option. Follow the soil test recommendations for the right amount to apply.

Myth: Prevent tomato blossom rot with eggshells or antacids in the soil. Another myth bites the dust. It may be that blossom rot is caused by too much magnesium or ammonium in the soil,

or because root damage is hindering water uptake. Adding calcium won't help. Blossom rot can be prevented by consistent watering, not overwatering, and use of mulch. Avoid root damage by cultivating a safe distance from the plants and fertilize according to your soil test recommendations.

Hopefully, you've noticed a recurring theme in this article – soil testing! Yes, it is extremely important to know your soil. Testing is best done in the early fall but can be done now so that any amendments needed have time to adjust the soil in time for the spring growing season. Soil tests are available through your local Agriculture Extension Agency. You will find instructions on how to sample your soil and receive a container for sending the sample to the testing lab. You will receive a written report with recommendations for amending the soil to improve productivity. And it is an inexpensive way to ensure you have healthy soil.

There are many resources online that help debunk gardening myths. All you need to do is search for garden myths .edu. You'll be amazed at how much information you will find from reliable, scientific sources when you add .edu to your search. Another way to assess information is to apply the CRAAP test. Yes, that really is the name of the test. The acronym stands for Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose. You can download a pdf of the test at <https://library.csuchico.edu/sites/default/files/craap-test.pdf>

One other incredible resource for a wide range of gardening and horticulture myth busting is at <https://puyallup.wsu.edu/lcs/>

Resources

“Debunking Garden Myths”, <https://extension.psu.edu/debunking-garden-myths>

“Gardening Myths: Five Myths That Are Just Too Good to be True”, <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/2020/05/gardening-myths-five-myths-are-just-too-good-be-true>

“Some garden myths and what science has to say”, <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/node/96711/printable/print>

“Coffee grounds, eggshells and Epsom salts in the home garden”, <https://extension.umn.edu/manage-soil-nutrients/coffee-grounds-eggshells-epsom-salts>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.