

Lawn and Tree Myths

What is a myth? Webster defines a myth as a falsehood; an unfounded belief. Let us talk about some lawn and tree myths.



Myth: Mushrooms and toadstools in your lawn means that the soil lacks nutrients.

Fact: In actuality, these plants are merely the above-ground growth of fungus organisms living in soil. Some fungi live on buried lumber, dead roots, or fine particles of organic matter. Others live in harmony with tree roots, assisting in the uptake of water and nutrients. A few cause plant disease. The sudden appearance of mushrooms does not mean the lawn needs lime, fertilizer or anything else. If you object to their sprouting in lawns or gardens, use a rake to dispose of them. There is no chemical control for mushrooms.

Myth: Moss is killing the lawn.

Fact: No, the moss is not killing the lawn. It is only an opportunist moving in. Moss will grow instead of grass when there is poor drainage (aerate the soil), poor fertility (feed the soil), or there is too much shade.

Myth: Using sod rather than seeding a lawn is less work because you do not have to prepare the soil as well.

Fact: The ground should be prepared in the same way whether you are seeding your lawn or using sod.



Myth: The soil under oaks and pines is acidic.

Fact: This is sometimes true, sometimes false. The acidity of soil depends not only on the nature of vegetation growing on it, but also on the type of rock below. Some soils under oaks and pines are neutral or alkaline, needing no lime.



Myth: When transplanting trees or shrubs into landscapes, amend the backfill soil with organic matter.

Fact: It seems logical that steer manure, peat moss, compost, etc. would improve poor soils by increasing aeration, nutritional value, and water-holding capacity. And they do-in the immediate vicinity of the planting hole. However, the roots will be reluctant to leave and expand into the unamended soil that is present throughout the garden. This will impact the plant by stunting its growth.

Myth: Mulch is not harmful to trees.

Fact: Organic mulches correctly applied encourage better roots by keeping the soil cool and moist. Tree roots are shallow and need air as much as they need water. Trees and woody plants should have no mulch against their trunks or base. Mulch piled against the woody part of a tree or shrub keeps that part of the plant constantly moist or wet, which promotes the growth of trunk and root rots. Mulch that is too deep over the roots (over 3 to 4 inches)

reduces the amount of air available. Finer mulches (cocoa hulls, shredded bark) that tend to compact should be shallower than coarse, chunky mulches (wood chips).

Myth: The canopy of a tree mirrors the root system of the tree.

Fact: The root system of a tree is NOT a mirror image of the canopy. The majority of tree roots are in the top 18 to 24 inches of soil. An accurate analogy is a goblet or wine glass in which the bowl is in the tree canopy and the roots are the foot. In an unimpeded area, the roots will span an area 3 to 5 times the height of the tree.



Myth: When it comes to garden chemicals, if a little bit is good, a lot is better.

Fact: This myth is not only false but also dangerous. Doubling or tripling the dose of any garden chemical can have disastrous results. Weed killers used in this manner can injure plants you never intended to harm, not to mention leaving long-lived residues in soil. Over-use of insecticides may kill beneficial bugs, harm plants and render vegetables unfit for consumption. Doubling the recommended rate of any pesticide increases the chances of poisoning people by inhalation, absorption through the skin, and by other routes. Fertilizers used too heavily will burn plants, prevent seed germination, and contaminate water resources. Even organic fertilizers such as manure can cause harm if you use too much. With all chemicals, the responsible gardener should **READ THE LABEL.**