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Month of May for education and awareness of environmental sensitivities/multiple chemical sensitivities

Gardening with Health in Mind

Summer is here, and with it the sun and the warmth. Many of us are now starting to garden, planting tomatoes, melons, green beans, and many other seasonal delicacies. What is left to do now is to ensure that we will enjoy the hard-earned products of our labor in a few weeks. Losing your garden due to pests and insects, or to the lack of water during heat waves, or to poor soil quality is something we want to avoid at all costs. But before choosing pesticides or artificial fertilizers, let's look at options that are eco- and health-friendly, as the two often go hand in hand.



Nature can work for you. As we often say, Nature does things well. All ecosystems thrive on a balance that can and will work for you if you allow it, without you having to upset the balance with pesticides. Looking at bugs, you have to differentiate between the ones helping your garden thrive... and those damaging it. For example, ladybugs are very common in Quebec. These volunteering workers feed on aphids, mites and scale. However, do not use pesticides if you want to attract this beneficial bug, and adding plants that they like, such as dill, chives or cilantro might help attract them. It is the same with bigger animals, such as toads that eat slugs, or sparrows that feed on crickets. Welcome nature in your garden!

Three sisters garden. If the first piece of advice was to listen to nature, the second is about



listening to culture and tradition. The three sisters planting method was used by Native Americans and utilized corn, beans, and squash. These three vegetables not only support each other in how they grow—beans use the corn to grow, the squash protects the roots—but they also enrich the soil each with particular elements that help the others grow better. But that's not the only combination: tomatoes growing next to basil or cilantro—the same cilantro that attracts ladybugs—will grow more flavorful. Find your garden buddies!

Stop hunting down your dandelions. As the first few yellow spots appear in the garden



in the spring, the hunt to exterminate every single dandelion begins. Don't, please don't. Bees and other pollinators need them, and so do you. You need bees and their pollinating work for healthy and strong plants. By keeping dandelions, you keep pollinators in your garden. And dandelions are pretty flowers too, so appreciate them!

Compost and manure to boost your soil quality.

Compost can get nasty really quickly, but a few ingredients commonly found in our kitchens can easily help us fertilize the soil. The most recurring ones are banana peels, coffee grounds and eggshells. Banana peels are a slow-release fertilizer for nitrogen, magnesium and phosphorus; coffee grounds have phosphorus, potassium and magnesium; and eggshells contain calcium. Try to make these ingredients as small as possible, and with time they will decompose naturally into the soil. On the other hand, if you happen to live near a stable, try getting some manure as it will act as an excellent natural fertilizer. Start digging!

Fertilize your land through crop rotation. Monocropping, the agricultural practice of using the same type of crop repeatedly in the same field, impoverishes the soil. When a plant is growing, there is an ecological economy: a plant takes some nutrients that it needs to grow from the soil and gives back what it has. Using the same crop overtime weakens the potential of this economy. Using crop rotation leads to a diversity of plants and thus a diversity of nutrients used and released each time in the soil. Change is good!



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To go Further

Popular mechanics, *Know your garden's insect friends and foes,*

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BBC, *The production of compost and manure by farmers and gardeners,*

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