



10+ MOST COMMON GARDENING MISTAKES

Barbara J. Bromley, Mercer County Horticulturist 07

1. IMPROPER PLANT SELECTION/PLACEMENT

- Not knowing ultimate landscape plant size.
- Not knowing where N-S-E-W are in relation to your house.
- Planting broad-leaved evergreens facing an unshaded south or west.
- Not considering plant needs (sun, shade, moist, dry, air circulation)
- Overusing plants most likely to have pests or problems.

2. LACK OF ATTENTION TO SOIL PREPARATION AND CARE

- Liming and fertilizing without a soil test to determine need and amounts.
- Removing organic materials (leaves, pine needles, grass clippings, weeds), but not regularly replacing this loss with an organic supplement, such as compost.
- Failing to determine drainage conditions before planting.

3. IMPROPER PLANTING PRACTICES

- Planting at the wrong depth: too deep or too high ("bump" planting) in relation to the trunk flare or digging undersized holes.
- Not slicing or butterflying the matted root systems of container grown plants.
- Adding soil amendments when planting trees.

4. INSUFFICIENT POST-TRANSPLANT CARE

- Not treating transplanted trees and shrubs as transplants for an appropriate period of time. (Recovery for balled and burlapped plants ranges from 1 to 10 years. Trunk diameter plus one equals recovery years.)
- Not folding back burlap, cutting off wire cages, and removing twine at the time of planting.
- Using unnecessary support wires, wraps, and stakes, then failing to remove them after one year.

5. IMPROPER IRRIGATION PRACTICES

- Watering in the late afternoon or early evening instead of early morning.
- Frequent shallow watering instead of less frequent deep watering.

6. IMPROPER MULCH APPLICATIONS

- "Volcano mulching" the base of trees and shrubs is a terrible practice. (Do not apply over 2-3 in. deep.)
- Allowing mulch to touch the trunks or stems of trees and shrubs. (Keep at least several inches away.)
- Using white marble chip mulch (limestone) on acid-loving plants.

7. IMPROPER PESTICIDE USE

- Reading only parts of pesticide labels, thereby missing important information.
- Using a pesticide without knowing the pest, plant, right time to spray or other non-pesticide options.
- Using "cover" sprays over a whole landscape or lawn. (Treat only the plant or lawn area that is infested or infected to reduce the probability of insect resistance to pesticides and killing of beneficials.)

8. IMPROPER PRUNING PRACTICES

- Pruning tree limbs flush with the trunk instead of leaving the branch collar intact.
- Allowing shade trees to be headed back ("hat-racked") for size control.
- Pruning spring bloomers after July. (Buds are set by September for spring bloom.)
- Removing leaves from flowering bulbs before the leaves have yellowed.

9. ILL-TIMED PROGRAMS

- Pruning and fertilizing woody plants between mid-July and mid-October.
- Lawn seeding in mid-summer or late fall. (Late August/early September (best) or late winter/early spring are more effective times of year to seed large areas of lawn.)

10. NOT CONSULTING RELIABLE RESOURCES FOR INFORMATION

- Digging any hole in New Jersey before calling 811, the *Call Before You Dig* number.
- Not using Cooperative Extension, Master Gardener Helplines, or other qualified experts for answers.