

Simple tips for keeping diseases at bay in your garden

Every year, gardeners lose sleep, hair and have their general happiness eroded through the onslaught of a range of diseases that sicken their plants and undermine their efforts to create a beautiful and productive yard and garden. While you can't always fix every problem, there are a few things that you can do to try and minimize the impact due to disease.

- **Start clean** – It is critical to start with the best plant material that you can. Just because something is cheap doesn't mean you should purchase and plant it. Select plants that are healthy, free from disease, and that are actively growing (if that is what you want). Make sure that the location that you have selected is good enough to give the plants a chance to get established and give them a head start on any attackers.
- **Accept defeat (temporarily)** – Some diseases will come back year after year and some diseases have very specific hosts. If you get a disease that needs a certain host, consider not growing that plant for a couple of years, or if you have the space, don't plant in that location. It might mean sacrificing the taste of a favorite veggie for a short time, but in the long run, breaking the disease cycle will hopefully mean fewer headaches in the long run.
- **Don't overwater or overfeed** – It is possible to kill with kindness, especially in the garden. Don't succumb to the temptation to keep throwing water and fertilizers at the plants. Healthy plants are more resistant to disease (generally), whereas plant gluttons are lush, soft and overgrown: easy targets.
- **Drainage** – Plants generally aren't adapted to growing in water and react accordingly when subjected to saturated or overly moist conditions. Too much water will usually result in poor, weak growth and an increase in both root rots and other diseases.
- **Let the air flow** – Stagnant air or poor air flow results in higher humidity and the potential for more foliar diseases. Don't put plants too close together, either in beds, between or within rows. Ensure that perennials are pruned properly and don't create a completely enclosed, over-sheltered environment.
- **Encourage drying** – Most diseases thrive in moist conditions. The longer leaves and plants stay wet, the easier and more quickly diseases can develop. Consider watering in the morning, when plants will dry out more quickly. Consider watering the soil surface, not the foliage.
- **Notice and rogue the rogues** – If something looks weird or abnormal, take a closer look and see what is going on. Consider taking anything that is abnormal out, in case it spreads to other plants.
- **Remove and bury** – Another way to break the disease cycle is to get rid of infected material. If something is aggressively moving through a planting, do your best to contain it. When the season is done, encourage a rapid breakdown of the diseased material by burying it or removing it entirely from the site.