

June Gardening Workshop: Hardening, Planting, Fertilizing, and Composting

Hardening:

Hardening plants that you have grown from seedlings or those that you have purchased from a nursery is an important step for gardeners. Hardening applies to both plants and vegetables. When a plant is seeded and grown in a greenhouse or a nursery, that is the perfect environment and the plant thrives. A greenhouse or a nursery waters regularly, is warm and humid and there is no wind. Hardening basically acclimates a plant to its new environment. It enhances stem strength and gets the plant acclimatized to the sunlight and temperature.

To harden vegetables, move them to an outdoor area that is not in direct sunlight or strong wind. Leave your plants outside for about an hour. Every couple of days, increase the time outside by about 30 minutes. When the plants are used to being outside, slowly move them towards a sunnier area. Increase the sun exposure each day. Hardening should take about two weeks. Don't try to rush this process! Hardening should also be done with annuals.

Planting:

Once your plant is properly hardened, you can plant it in your garden. When removing the plant from the container, do so gently and do not pull the plant from the container. Squeeze the container to loosen the soil and tip the container on its side. Then, gently dump the plant into your hand. Roots grow down and out, and, as previously mentioned, most vegetables have a very shallow root system, so loosen the roots a bit by pulling them gently apart before you plant them. Once planted, compost can be placed about four inches around the base of the plant. Water the plant and check it each day to ensure that the soil is moist, and the plant is not under stress.

Fertilizing:

Fertilizing plants is important as it boosts leaf production which in turn, promotes the development of roots and helps plants distribute water. Fertilizers generally contain nitrogen which assists with the leaf growth. Fertilizers should be used at the time of planting and during the growth period. As discussed earlier, soil nutrients deplete over time, so fertilizers boost the soil reserves. You only need to fertilize a couple of times during the growing season. This is not something that you should do every week. Fertilizers can burn the plants, so read the directions carefully as to how to use and at what strength. More is not better when it comes to fertilizers.