



## BUYING SEEDS AND PLANTS

Some garden centers sell seeds, plants, and sprays containing neonicotinoids, substances that are chemically similar to nicotine and toxic to birds and insects, particularly bees.

Verify with your garden suppliers that their products are “neonic free.” See the *Commercial Suppliers section for recommended garden centers, p. 21.*

## IMPROVING AND MAINTAINING YOUR GARDEN SOIL

- *Testing.* Every few years have your garden soil tested (see *Soil section, p. 5*). The pH should be between 6 and 7.
- *Amendments (such as lime).* Be guided by your soil test, using only natural organic products in the amounts recommended. Best applied in the fall.
- *Compost.* Applying compost is the most effective way to ensure healthy flowers, vegetables, and bushes. It is best to put it down in the fall. Spread a 3-4” layer of compost over vegetable and flower gardens and around flowering bushes. In the spring, work the compost into the soil, creating a smooth surface for planting. The compost will nourish your plants throughout the summer and will help to retain the water that is so vital for them.
- *Fertilizing annuals.* During the summer, annuals need an occasional little boost. Every two weeks through August, feed these plants with an organic fertilizer such as Neptune’s Harvest or compost tea (for the recipe, see the *Lawns section, p. 7*).
- *Pest problems – See Pests and How to Treat Them section, p. 14.*

## WATERING AND WEEDING

- *Weeding.* The gardeners reading this booklet won’t need to be reminded about the importance of consistent weeding. Mulching with straw, grass clippings, or bark mulch helps keep the weeds down.

Many weeds are wildflowers that provide food for birds and insects. Try to make places where they can happily coexist with your ornamentals, or leave them on the back 40!

- *Watering.* Keeping plants properly moist is essential. When possible, use drip irrigation hoses, which save on water use.

## DISPOSING OF INFECTED PLANTS

- *During the growing season.* Remove infected leaves and burn them. Do not put them in the compost.
- *After the growing season.* Allow plants to freeze or remove and burn them.

## NATURAL GARDEN CARE CALENDAR

April	Rake up leaves and debris.
May	When the soil is workable, dig the compost that you applied in the fall into the soil and add an additional ¼ inch. If you have had a soil test, apply amendments as per results. Apply a natural fertilizer such as Espoma to ornamental shrubs. Begin planting garden.
June	Continue planting garden. When plants are established, put down mulch if you are using it. Weed by hand as necessary. Water as necessary.
July & August	Apply compost tea or other organic liquid fertilizer to annuals every other week. Weed by hand as necessary. Water as necessary.
September	Weed by hand as necessary. Water as necessary.
September/October	If you have had a soil test in the spring or early fall, be guided by the results, adding amendments in the amounts recommended. Pull up the spent annuals and put them on your compost pile (unless they are diseased, in which case, burn them). Remove any infected plant material completely. Disease overwinters in dead plant material and/or in the soil, so removing this plant material can make a big difference. Be aware that leaves and branches can be winter habitat for bees and other beneficials, so consider this before completely clearing gardens before winter. Make sure the garden is completely free of weeds.
October/November	Spread a 3-4" layer of compost over your flower and vegetable gardens and around ornamental bushes.