

Basic Gardening Terms

There are a few basic gardening terms that everyone interested in growing plants should understand. It helps you know what they are talking about on the gardening shows and in the books. We aren't talking about all those Latin tongue-tying names of plants, but just the basic language of gardening. And who knows – once you have mastered the basics, you might find yourself doing a little research on the anatomy of plants or talking with your friends about the *Echinacea purpurea* you found at Hicks Nurseries!

Acid (Sour)

A pH reading measured below 7.0; most plants prefer slightly acid soil with a pH of 6.0 to 6.5.

Alkaline (Sweet)

A pH reading measured above 7.0.

Annual

A plant whose life cycle is completed in one season.

Arborist

A person who specializes in tree maintenance.

Balled and Burlapped (B&B)

A way of preparing plants for transplantation that includes digging up the root ball and wrapping it in burlap to protect the root ball and aid in handling.

Biennial

A plant whose life cycle is completed in two seasons.

Botanical Name

The scientific name for one specific plant; comprised of the Genus (always capitalized) and species (not capitalized); this combination is also referred to as the Latin binomial.

Clay

Soil type made up of 50% or more clay (the smallest particles of minerals in the soil); clay soils are usually very heavy and drain slowly.

Common Name

A name given to a plant that has no scientific standing; common names are often fun and colorful, but they can also be inaccurate; the same name may apply to more than one plant and they vary regionally.

Compost

Decayed plant matter usually used as a soil conditioner or fertilizer.

Deciduous

A plant that loses its leaves each winter.

Dormancy

The extended period when a plant rests; most plants are dormant during the winter in our climate.

Drainage

Ability of the soil to release water.

Evergreen

A plant that keeps its leaves throughout the whole growing season.

Fertilizer

Any material that is used to feed growing plants.

Fungicide

Substance used for controlling fungi.

Groundcover

A low-growing, spreading plant; usually 18 inches or less; often herbaceous.

Hardening Off

Slowly exposing a plant to cooler temperatures to help it adapt to outdoor conditions; this process is also sometimes called acclimating.

Herb

A term usually applied to plants that are valued for culinary, aromatic or medicinal purposes; many herbs are also ornamental.

Herbaceous

Non-woody plants that die back to the ground each winter and regrow the next season.

Herbicide

Any chemical that kills plants.

Horticulturist

A person who specializes in plants and their culture.

Humus

Organic (was once living) matter that has broken down in the soil.

Hybrid

Closely related plants; hybrid plants do not come true from their own seed.

Inorganic

Derived from non-living material.

Insecticide

Substance used for controlling insects.

Invasive

Any plant that is difficult to control.

Landscape Designer

A person who specializes in the overall layout, design and construction of ornamental plantings and landscape features.

Loam

Soil that contains relatively equal parts of clay, sand and silt.

Macronutrient

Essential nutrients used in relatively large amounts by plants; plant macronutrients include nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sulfur, oxygen, magnesium, hydrogen, calcium and carbon.

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Micronutrient

Essential nutrients used in relatively small amounts by plants; plant micronutrients include boron, chlorine, copper, iron, manganese, molybdenum and zinc.

Mulch

Any material put on the surface of the soil for looks, to help cool the soil or to reduce weeds, erosion or evaporation.

Native

This term is poorly defined; it is usually used to refer to plants that were found growing in a given area before man arrived and began introducing non-native plants; although the word native is often used as positive and non-native as negative, there are invasive natives and very well-behaved non-natives.

Non-Native or Exotic

Another poorly defined term; usually used to refer to any plants that were not originally growing in an area (i.e. when man arrived).

N-P-K

Designates the ratio of N Nitrogen to P Phosphorus to K Potassium; the three major nutrients. Appears on fertilizer packages as 5-10-5, for example.

Organic

Derived from living material.

Perennial

A plant that lives more than two growing seasons; usually herbaceous and dormant during the winter.

Pest

Collective term for any insect, plant pathogen (bacteria, fungus, virus) or weed.

Pesticide

Substance used to control any pest including insecticides, fungicides and herbicides.

pH

A measure of acidity or alkalinity of the soil on a scale ranging from 0 to 14; neutral soil has a pH of 7.0.

Pinching/Deadheading

Pinching is a process of removing the terminal (or tip) growth on a plant in order to encourage new growth; deadheading is removal of the spent flowers to encourage new growth and blooms.

Pollination

In flowering plants, pollination is the transfer of pollen from the anther (male part) to the stigma (female part); pollination is necessary for the flower to form seed and often, fruit; some flowers are perfect (having all the necessary parts) and other flowers are imperfect (separate male and female flowers).

Sand

The largest particles of minerals that make up soil.

Silt

The medium-size pieces of mineral that makes up soil; smaller particles than sand but larger than clay.

Soil

Layer of fine material on the crust of the earth composed tiny pieces of minerals, living and non-living organisms, water and air.

Soil Texture

Composition of the soil determined by the proportion of clay, silt and sand.

Transplant

To move a plant from one place to another.

Weed

Any plant growing where it isn't wanted, generally of no economic or esthetic value.

Woody Plant

With bark on older stems; woody stems usually survive over winter and increase in size each year.



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