

Soil Health Prevents Weeds & Pests

by Kris Hart

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(BUZZ MAGAZINE) - I spent several years gardening in a typical manner by tilling, planting, and slowly losing my garden to the ferocious weeds and pests. I personally felt as though God was pushing me to grow a healthy garden. I needed to push through the trials of it, but I was struggling. I thought to myself, "If God expected us, humans, to sustain ourselves with a garden, it can't be this hard." Nature does it, why can't I? It made no sense to me that nature has existed forever and I can't get

a garden to survive one season without the help of commercial herbicides and pesticides. This can't be the only way. He would never set our success behind the paywall of commercial growing supplies (GMO seed, pesticides, herbicides). There has to be a better way! I then learned to mimic nature with my garden and allow nature into my garden. Monoculture (growing vast amounts of one crop) is not the way nature was designed. Fertilizing plants is not the way nature takes in nutrients. Diversity is the key!

I learned a lot from nature. Nature feeds its plants through the soil. The soil is alive. The key to a healthy garden is having a healthy ecosystem that starts with healthy living soil teeming with roots, beneficial insects, and fungus. Moisture and nutrients are dispersed via root systems and Mycorrhizal fungus. Keeping your soil covered with a generous layer of mulch is a great way to keep the weeds down as this is how nature keeps its ground from becoming overcrowded with plants. It also acts as a slow-release fertilizer. The decomposers in the soil break down the organic matter that falls to the ground and they help aerate and fertilize the soil in their wake. The Mycorrhizal fungus spreads nutrients to different plants through its vast network of hair-like hyphae weaving through the soil and plant roots.

The Mycorrhizal fungus and the plants benefit each other as the plants provide the fungus with needed carbohydrates and the fungus provides plants with needed water and nutrients from the soil.

Healthy plants don't attract very many pests. Weak and stressed plants do. Keeping your plants well maintained and well hydrated does a lot for warding off pests. Just like a wild predator, garden pests will take down the weakest plants. Some people will choose to leave one plant as a sacrificial plant for the pests, so the pests will leave the rest of the garden alone. This is a great strategy, but with time and experience you can keep your garden soil healthy and in turn your plants all healthy, and the pests... go away. Or better yet, never show up! Keeping your garden healthy will attract the best predators to keep your pest pressure down. I have found that birds and wasps love my garden. These two very different predators do great to keep the caterpillar population down and with no effort on my part!

I hope this information is helpful and you get out there and get your hands dirty! Please feel free to share your experience and tips on my Instagram or Facebook page @BottomViewFarmIL.

Kris Hart lives in Litchfield and has a small hobby farm making strides towards sustainable living and organic/heirloom gardening. Contact her at kris.hart17@yahoo.com.

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