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VISA, M.C., AMERICAN EXPRESS



## HOME & GARDEN

### The Secret to Successful Gardening

What is it that makes some gardeners more successful than others? Are their thumbs greener? Is their love of soil and dirt so intense, they compel their flowers and plants into thriving through sheer force of will? It's nothing so extraordinary. The most successful gardeners simply understand, appreciate and use the basic principles of great gardening, including how to properly condition the soil. It works like this: A plant needs loosely structured soil that provides its roots with organic matter, moisture, nutrients and air circulation. Trees, shrubs, flowers, vegetables, lawns, seeds -- they all grow better when planted in soil conditioned with Canadian sphagnum peat moss. Gardeners who regularly use peat moss reap many benefits, including being able to use less water, less fertilizer and fewer pesticides. More peat moss means less watering -- Canadian sphagnum peat moss holds up to 20 times its dry weight in moisture, releasing it slowly to plants as needed, resulting in less frequent watering. Peat prevents leaching -- Peat moss stores nutrients from compost and organic fertilizer and prevents nutrients such as nitrogen from seeping away. Peat lets you cut down on pesticide use -- Peat moss reduces the need for pesticides by strengthening the lawn, beefing up its natural defenses that help fight off pests. Sure, the results can be impressive, but conditioned soil isn't magic. There is plenty of science behind the benefits that peat moss can bring to a lawn and garden. Here's a quick peat moss primer: Peat aerates heavy soil -- It helps loosen and aerate clay soils to allow proper root growth. Peat binds sandy soil -- Peat adds body to light sandy soil to help it retain water and nutrients. Peat protects soil -- Peat moss protects soil from hardening, reduces the potential for erosion from wind and heavy rains and adds organic material. Peat is long lasting -- Peat moss decomposes slowly over several years compared to compost, which typically decomposes within one year. Peat moss is environmentally friendly -- Canadian sphagnum peat moss is a sustainable resource, accumulating 60 times faster than the amount harvested each year. Peat moss is harvested on less than .02 percent of Canadian peat bogs, and bogs can be restored when harvesting is finished. To return a harvested bog into a functioning peatland, peat growers -- after some preparation -- spread chopped sphagnum from a virgin bog over the site, then cover it with straw to keep it from drying out. Within two years, a green carpet of bog plants covers the surface of the restored site and, in a few more years, the site becomes a functioning peatland once again. The more you know about how peat moss helps a plant thrive, the better you can make the soil work for you -- and your garden.

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