

# Friday Facts: Tips for a Greener Garden



**Consider starting a compost pile.** Compost is an alternative way to dispose of your vegetable kitchen scraps, grass clipping, and yard waste instead of sending it to a landfill along with the rest of your garbage. Compost is an excellent source of fertilizer for all types of plants. Aside from providing nutrients and stimulating healthy root development, the addition of compost also improves soil texture, aeration, and water retention. See the attached guide for information on how to get started.

**Keep your grass longer.** Keeping your grass longer will discourage weeds and insect pests, which lessens the need for applying insecticides and herbicides. Longer grass also shades the soil, preventing it from drying out and requiring less water in the long run. When you do mow, mulch rather than bag the clippings.

**Explore green alternatives to garden chemicals.** Try using less hazardous remedies for controlling unwanted weeds and insects. These green alternatives are readily available at most stores. For example BurnOut II Weed Killer, made from vinegar, lemon juice and natural oils, such as clove, kills common weeds but is gentle on nearby plants. Or try a homemade version. Soft soap or tobacco mixed with water and applied to plants with a spray bottle is a great insect repellent.

**Start collecting rainwater.** Setting up a rain barrel is an inexpensive and easy way to capture mineral- and chlorine-free water for watering your lawn and garden. Equip your barrel with a screen to keep out insects and other debris. And use the water supply frequently to keep it from becoming stale or rancid. You will not only save on water costs, but also reduce storm water runoff, which in turn helps prevent erosion and flooding. Uncovered water left standing for 7 days or more can lead to mosquito breeding so make sure you cover your barrel or utilize the water frequently.

**Plant a Shade Tree.** Shade trees can help keep your home cool, reducing the need for air conditioning and helping you save on utility costs. Trees also help prevent soil erosion, and storm water runoff, while providing habitats for wildlife. Get the best results by planting trees to the west and southwest of buildings. Deciduous plants work well in our area because they block sunlight in summer but let it in during the colder winter months.

**Be smart about watering.** Water early in the day to avoid evaporation. Adding mulch will also help soil retain water. Opt for soaker hoses or drip irrigation, both of which will use only half the water that a sprinkler would.

For more information about Earth Day, visit [www.kansasgreenteams.org](http://www.kansasgreenteams.org).

