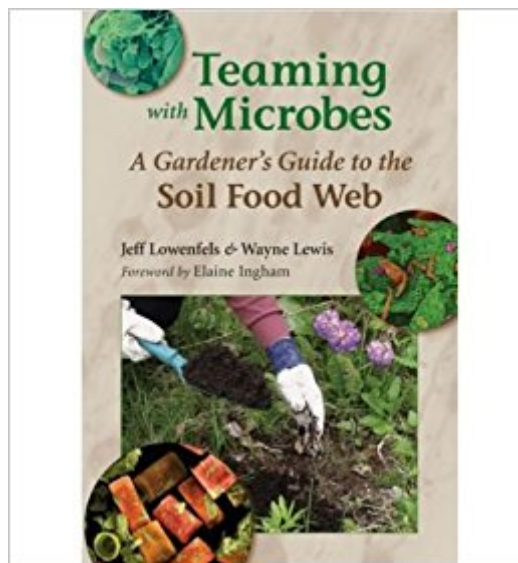




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Teaming With Microbes: A Gardener's Guide To The Soil Food Web



Synopsis

Smart gardeners know that soil is anything but an inert substance. Healthy soil is teeming with life-not just earthworms and insects, but a staggering multitude of bacteria, fungi, and other microorganisms. When we use chemical fertilizers, we injure the microbial life that sustains healthy plants, and thus become increasingly dependent on an arsenal of artificial substances, many of them toxic to humans as well as other forms of life. But there is an alternative to this vicious circle: to garden in a way that strengthens, rather than destroys, the soil food web-the complex world of soil-dwelling organisms whose interactions create a nurturing environment for plants. By eschewing jargon and overly technical language, the authors make the benefits of cultivating the soil food web available to a wide audience, from devotees of organic gardening techniques to weekend gardeners who simply want to grow healthy, vigorous plants without resorting to chemicals.

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Customer Reviews

"All good gardeners know healthy plants start with healthy soil. But why? And how? In *Teaming with Microbes* Lowenfels and Lewis reveal the new research in the most practical and accessible way." Kym Pokorny, *The Oregonian* (Anchorage Daily News)"For years, we've thought of the 'food chains' in our environment. Lowenfels and Lewis explain an even more wonderful idea: the 'soil food web.' Read *Teaming with Microbes* and keep it or give it to the library so others may learn of this astounding way to grow vegetables, trees, lawns." (Detroit News)"Sure, it's a gardening book, but it has all the drama and suspense of an extraterrestrial thriller.... Read this book and you'll never look

at soil the same way." (B & B Magazine) "[This book] is a must read for any gardener looking to create a sustainable, healthy garden without chemicals." (Virginian-Pilot) "It is exciting that the revelations herein are the tip of the iceberg in the complex, microscopic world of our soil that will unfold in the coming decades." (The Oregonian) "It takes readers underground to meet the critters that live if you let them under the garden." (Rockland Courier-Gazette) "All good gardeners know healthy plants start with healthy soil. But why? And how? In *Teaming with Microbes* Lowenfels and Lewis reveal the new research in the most practical and accessible way." (Anchorage Daily News) "For years, we've thought of the 'food chains' in our environment. Lowenfels and Lewis explain an even more wonderful idea: the 'soil food web.' Read *Teaming with Microbes* and keep it or give it to the library so others may learn of this astounding way to grow vegetables, trees, lawns." (Washington Gardener) "Read this book and you'll never think of soil the same way." (Seattle Post-Intelligencer) "The authors have given gardeners an inside scoop on the scientific research supporting organic gardening." (Pacific Horticulture) "This book has all the best dirt on all the best dirt. It...explains the basics of good soil practices, and it's written especially for home gardeners." (Nature's Way Resources) "This is sure to gain that well-thumbed look that any good garden book acquires as it is referred to repeatedly over the years." (Detroit News) "This is the most complete book on the market about biological or organic methods in horticulture...highly recommended for all gardeners, landscapers, or anyone taking care of a lawn or garden." (DrWeil.com News) "[This book] is a must read for any gardener looking to create a sustainable, healthy garden without chemicals." (Florida Survival Gardening) "If you want to get a good understanding of how soils really work, and learn how to really feed your soil (and thus, your plants), there is a great book that explains it all very well, and also explains how to make really good compost and compost tea. It is concise and uses nonscientific terminology. The book is *Teaming With Microbes; A Gardener's Guide To The Soil Food Web* by Jeff Lowenfels and Wayne Lewis." "The information in this book is eye-opening and consistently entertaining." "This very well illustrated hardback is a scientific view of many different kinds of soil microbes which include bacteria, fungi, algae, protozoa, nematodes and many others."

Teaming With Microbes describes the activities of the organisms that make up the soil food web and explains how to foster and cultivate the life of the soil. The straightforward text is accessible to a wide audience of gardeners who want to grow healthy, vigorous plants without resorting to chemicals.

I was disheartened to read in the Preface to "Teaming with Microbes: A Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web" that the first part of the book would be difficult to get through. I pressed on. Very science-y. An excellent sleep inducer. No joke. I did fall asleep while reading it one warm afternoon. But it was definitely worth it. Like the authors, I urge you to read the entire book and not just the second part which is the heart of the book. Their argument boils down to one sentence: "No one ever fertilized an old-growth forest". Think about all the wild places you have ever seen, lush with growth. How did they get that way without the help of Scott's or Miracle-Gro? And if Scott's and Miracle-Gro are so superior, why don't our yards and gardens look better than those wild places? The authors' thesis is that we should garden like Nature gardens, working with the flora and fauna in the soils rather than against it through the use of compost, organic mulches and actively aerated compost tea. Best of all, they provide precise instructions and call for materials that most of us have on hand anyways. No need for expensive ingredients or equipment! I was thrilled to discover that I am not a "lazy composter" as I have always thought. Instead, I practice cold composting (not turning the compost), a method that produces the most "nutritious" compost! And what I jokingly refer to as "composting in situ", using the mower to shred up leaves and dumping them with the grass clippings onto my beds in the fall is actually a recommended mulch. As are the leaves I leave in my gardens over the winter. The only thing I am doing wrong is removing the leaves in the spring. And my deepest, darkest secret is nothing to be ashamed of. Instead of carefully working my compost into the soil, I just spread it on top. Again, a recommended method for amending the soil! Of course, there are things that I have to do differently. Such as leaving the leaves on my beds. And even though I don't roto-till, I should still stop "loosening" the soil in the spring when I plant my seeds. The soil should be disturbed as little as possible. Planting in individual holes or narrow furrows is fine. I should learn to make and use actively aerated compost teas. Perhaps most importantly instead of throwing anything and everything into my composter, I should pay closer attention to the individual ingredients and their proportions, maybe go so far as to have different composters to make compost tailored to the needs of the various plants in my gardens. This is a wonderful book that I will be referring to again and again.

I live in Hawaii and have been struggling with my garden for two years now. Some of the gardeners in the area have turned to the method in this book. They are very successful. I am changing over and will be ready by next spring to go with this guide. I can't say that it works for me as it will be a year or so for me to really know, however, I am more than anxious to begin. I feel positive about the

method from what I have seen with the successful gardeners nearby.

From the first page through the last, this book is interesting. All of the little gardening mysteries that plagued me for so long are finally revealed in this book. I've heard the phrase "fixing nitrogen" for so long but never had it explained to me in a way that convinced me it wasn't just mumbo jumbo. This book explains what that means and why it is so important. I question everything until it makes perfect sense to me. This book really makes sense. Read the instructions on a bag of organic fertilizer and it often says something like scratch the fertilizer into the top inch of soil around the plant. I always questioned this, because I knew my plants roots went way deeper than one inch and very few of them resided in the top inch of soil. If the product is really water soluble then maybe it will eventually soak into the root zone but most aren't. This book explains that you're not really feeding your plant directly. You are feeding the microbes that reside in that top inch of soil and they interact with one another in many fascinating ways that end up feeding your plant. If you are a gardener with an inquisitive mind, you will love this book I promise. I think the author is also working on a second edition. I can't wait.

This book is awesome for truly explaining organic gardening - both how and why. It tells you how to have an almost fertilizer-free lawn using microbes in compost tea and compost, and how to encourage the right kind of microbes for your various plants through the use of different kinds of mulches. It explains each step in the soil food web, how to identify any holes in your soil food web, and different steps you can take to improve the health and variety of microbes in your yard and garden. I was surprised at some common gardening practices which are actually bad for your yard!!! It was an enjoyable read with lots of interesting pictures, and made absolutely clear the importance of healthy soil when growing plants, and how to achieve it naturally and easily.

This is a page-turner of a science lesson about dirt. It explains why throwing a bucket of worms on your crummy soil doesn't generally do much - that alive soil (read "healthy soil") contains bazillions of interconnected microbes, bugs, worms, and things we haven't yet discovered, working in concert to turn rocks and dead things into nutrients for plants. Most amazing to me: plant roots exude substances that attract what they need. As long as we supply a good smorgasbord for all the things living in our soil, and keep it moist, the details work themselves out. LOVED it. Did I mention that?

This small book has powerful information about how we can understand the soil-food-web and build

a sustainable future. As an organic gardener, I find the ideas and facts in this book highly valuable. We do not need to add chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides to our soils. We can build healthy soil and grow healthy vegetables for our food without Monsanto. By following the principles in this volume I have seen our ornamental plants thrive and our vegetable crops improve year by year. Everyone who can should try to grow their own food in healthy soil and put Agribiz out of biz.

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