



SCOTT
AUSTIN

Turf's Up

Why I like Myke

If we gardeners only knew what was going on both above and below the soil as we labour away, we would be astonished.

Millions of insects unseen in our world, millions more in the ground, and untold millions of soil organisms are working away. The presence of these organisms in the soil isn't something I used to spend much time contemplating.

Up to the time I saw the effect that fungi, specifically mycorrhizal fungi, had on my plants, I pretty much thought the earthworm was the only thing in the soil that mattered.

Let me explain. A couple of years ago, I received several containers of a product called Myke. It sat in my garage the first planting season, then last year I decided I'd try some. I followed the directions, put the recommended amount down in the planting holes for some of my annuals, both in the garden and in containers. I used the type for trees and shrubs for some shrubs that I planted in a new bed near the house. I used the vegetable type for tomatoes in the raised beds.

What is Myke? Mycorrhizal fungi are naturally occurring beneficial soil organisms. The Latin word mycor means fungus and rhiza is root. These fungi have a symbiotic, or mutually beneficial, relationship with plant roots in soil. The mycorrhizae create filaments, or threads, on the roots. They are basically extensions of the root system, enlarging the surface-absorbing area of the roots by 100-1000 times. If you increase the surface area of the roots, they'll be able to take up more nutrients and water.

In exchange, the fungus receives essential sugars and compounds from roots to fuel its own growth. This symbiotic relationship is one of the longest and most successful in nature.

There are a host of benefits to garden plants when Myke is used. The improved nutrient absorption increases fruit and flower production. It improves disease resistance, and lessens transplant shock. There are several miles of filaments in a single thimbleful of soil. They help to increase tolerance to drought, high soil temperatures and soil toxins.

I must admit that when I first read the packaging, and tried to understand exactly how Myke worked, my eyes glazed over like they used to in high school physics. But, having tried it last year, I'm a convert.

The plants did grow better. The Buddleia (butterfly bush) and Cotinus x Grace, (smoke tree) that I planted on the south side of my house (where temperatures easily reach 40 C. in summer) thrived. The tomatoes were bigger than they ever have been. The cosmos were huge.

It was when I pulled up the annuals in fall and saw how massive the root systems were that I was truly convinced. It's no wonder the plants did so well. Their root systems were twice as large as those of plants that I didn't plant with Myke. Will I be using it again when I start planting? Definitely.

Monrovia Nurseries, the largest grower of container plants in the world, has been using eight different types of mycorrhizae in their soil mixes for the past two years.

We have begun using it in our potted shrubs, trees and perennials this year. I'm excited to see what a difference it makes.

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