

# I Buy... I Try... It Dies...

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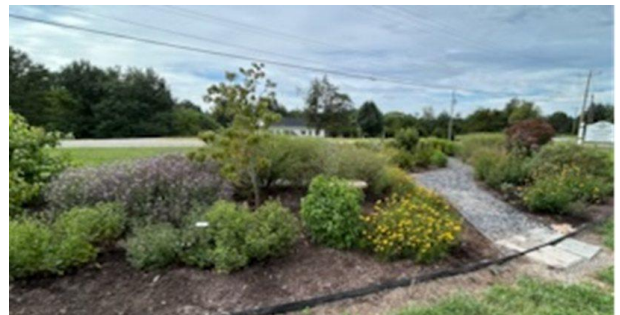
Do you tell people you have a black thumb? Have you bought a plant, followed all the advice on YouTube, only to watch it die just outside the return window?

Here's the truth: the black thumb is a myth! Most plant failures come down to a mismatch between the nursery potting mix your plant came in and the dense native soil in your yard. Successful transplanting is about managing the soil interface, the point where these two very different soils meet.

Nursery plants are grown in a light, fluffy mix of peat moss, pine bark, and perlite designed for fast growth and easy shipping. It drains quickly, but when it dries out, it can become hydrophobic and repel water, making it very hard to rewet. Virginia's native soil, on the other hand, is full of clay, silt, and sand with tiny particles that hold water tightly and release it slowly.

That difference creates problems. Even when the surrounding soil feels damp, the root ball can remain bone dry, stressing the plant. Filling the hole with straight compost doesn't help either. That soft pocket holds water differently than the surrounding clay, trapping moisture around the roots and leading to rot. Using the native soil, you dug out keeps water moving evenly through the root zone and helps the plant adapt.

The fix is simple: Skip the compost and use native soil backfill when planting, loosen any circling roots, and water the original root ball directly for the first few months. Once roots grow out into the surrounding soil, the plant settles in and starts to thrive.



*Photo by Katrina McIntosh*

## References:

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