

Celebrating 20 Years!

ask

the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest. Email or mail your questions to:

info@sprigsandtwigs.net or

Linda Lillie, Sprigs & Twigs Inc, PO Box 245, Gales Ferry, CT 06335

Question this Week: *I notice that nothing ever grows under my white pine tree. My neighbor said it is because the pine needles make the soil too acidic. Should I rake them up and throw them away? ...Anne*

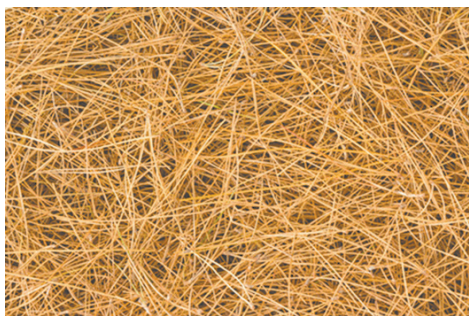
Linda's Answer:

Actually Anne, what your neighbor told you is not correct. It's an old garden myth that pine needles make the soil acidic, but that is not the case. Pine needles, green and on the tree are, are very slightly acidic. But once they're brown and fall off the tree, they are not acidic at all.

So, why won't anything grow under your pine tree? There are several reasons. 1)

Pine trees (and all trees for that matter) take up massive amounts of water into their shallow root systems. The tree out-competes a plant's need for water and plants trying to grow nearby struggle. Secondly, evergreens have dense shade beneath them year round which is inhospitable for grass and many other kinds of plants. So what do you do if you want plantings under your pine tree? There are three things: 1) Add more water through irrigation or frequent watering, 2) Use plants that thrive in deep shade such as Christmas Ferns, Barrenwort, Lowbush Blueberry (among others) and 3) Have Sprigs & Twigs professionally prune and thin your evergreen to allow a bit more light to filter to the base of the tree.

Pine needles have a number of great uses around your garden. They compost well; add them to your compost pile with plenty of moisture and they will breakdown into wonderful organic compost. They are also outstanding as garden mulch and are especially great under strawberries or other fruits or vegetables you want to keep off of direct contact with the soil. They are stiff but don't compact and allow air and strawberry runners to penetrate and get to the soil. Thick layers of pine needles also help retain garden soil moisture and help keep down weeds. Mixing some pine needles into the soil will build up organic content and help aerate the soil as well. If you struggle with slug damage to your plants, a ring of pine needles around the plant(s) will help keep the slugs away because they do like to climb over objects with sharp edges.



Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 20 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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06/14/16