

## Good Shepherd's Community Learning Garden

### *Garden Resources*

Charles Lewis, Chaplain of the Garden



772 South Johnson Avenue, El Cajon  
gsmcmarketplace@foothillsumc.org  
foothillsumc.org/good-shepherd/

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### **Planting and Care of Moringa Trees**

Moringa trees need full sun exposure to thrive in hot weather. They can reach 30 feet in height or can be easily kept to a productive six-foot bush for easy harvesting of the leaves. If left to grow tall you will need to avoid planting below overhead utility lines. Spacing trees six to nine feet apart provides adequate side growth capacity. The trees develop a large root structure, so be careful about underground utilities. After two years, the root structure holds enough moisture to provide protection from drought stress.

#### Preparing the Site

Dig a hole approximately 16 inches deep and wide. Fill the hole with water and let it drain. If it does not drain easily, add gypsum to the bottom of the hole and dig it into the soil. If the soil is not a loose and freely draining type, you will want to add perlite, potting soil, sand or compost. This provides the tap root easy access to grow deeply. It also provides a good bed for seed germination. If the water can easily drain, you will avoid root rot from accidental overwatering.

#### Fertilizer

After digging the hole and adding the perlite or soil amendments, you may wish to dig in to the soil an organic fertilizer. Organic fertilizers will not burn new plants. A great combination is a large handful of earth worm castings and two large handfuls of composted chicken manure. A small handful of Azomite (rock dust) is optional but does provide lots of micronutrients. Soak the soil with water.

#### Planting

Place the Moringa seed or seedling in the well-watered soil after the nighttime temperatures are consistently 50 degrees or higher. The seed should be planted two inches deep. A seedling root is planted with all the root below the soil surface.

### Mulch

Place a one-inch mulch of straw, leaves, or compost on top of the soil. The mulch will help to keep a good level of moisture in the ground. This is important for the seed to germinate. The seeds will germinate in 10 to 14 days.

### Moisture

Check moisture daily for the first month and water as needed to keep the soil moist. Push your finger into the soil to check for moisture at a level of two to three inches. Keep the soil moist but not soggy. Seed will not germinate without good moisture, but soggy soil will cause root rot.

When the seedlings are a foot tall, the mulch depth should be increased to four inches. Mulch helps reduce the need for water and prevents weeds. It also provides sun protection for the beneficial microorganisms that you have provided with the earthworm castings and compost.

When the plants are about 12 inches tall, you can cut watering to one time weekly during hot weather and less frequently if it is cool weather. If in doubt, use the finger moisture test or use an inexpensive moisture meter.

### Seasonal Tips

The Moringa tree will stop growing when cool weather arrives. It may lose all its leaves but will not die unless there is a hard freeze. You can cover the plant temporarily with a plastic bag, if the temperature is predicted to be less than 35 degrees. When Spring arrives, the plant will easily begin to grow again, even if it has lost all its leaves.

During the growing season from April to November, you may want to fertilize the plant every three months with a small handful of any balanced organic granular fertilizer or simply add some earth worm castings and composted chicken manure.

### Critters

Rabbits or other rodents may want to eat a tender new Moringa tree. Placing a three-foot chicken wire barrier around the plant will provide adequate protection. If gophers are expected, place some chicken wire inside the hole you have dug. Insects are usually not a problem, but Neem oil can be used if needed.

### Video Resources

MoringaForLife.com and YouTube both have excellent videos about the Moringa.

Drop by the Garden on Saturdays from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. to talk about your trees. Also, contact Sheryl Huffman, our expert in all aspects of Moringa, at [gsmcmarketplace@foothillsumc.org](mailto:gsmcmarketplace@foothillsumc.org).

Good luck and we will be glad to provide additional Moringa seeds if you need them!