

Organic Gardening



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Organic gardening is not as difficult as many beginning gardeners believe it is. It is true that there is a bit more work and increased attention level to the details of an organic garden than a regular garden. However, with the proper guidance you will soon discover it's not anywhere near as difficult as you thought it was. Organic Gardening simply means that you are planting your garden without using synthetic fertilizers to make the plants grow and chemical pesticides to control the bugs.

Organic gardening is one way to save money on your grocery bill. Many organic gardeners save thousands of dollars on fresh fruit and vegetables each year. Better yet, eating organic produce protects your health. Even fruits and vegetables labeled as "organic" at the grocery store sometimes are not organic at all. If you grow your food yourself though, you know exactly what you are getting. By choosing to work with nature, you make nature your ally. Organic gardening is easy to learn and if you have the time and motivation to grow your own crop.



Creating Your Organic Garden:

To really maximize your garden, regardless if its going to be flowers, herbs, veggies or a mixture of several plants it's best to have a detailed plan. And the best time to formulate your plan is in the fall, right after the fall growing season ends. The reason for this is you will have time to prepare the ground before the spring planting season begins.

The most critical thing you must do before anything else is to select the optimum location for your organic garden. Your plants will do extremely well if they can receive about six hours of sunlight per day. In almost all cases positioning of your planting area in the southeast part of your ground will give more than adequate amounts of sunshine. Also make sure your ground has easy access to water and the ground has good drainage, to allow water run off.

Once you have chosen your location, the next step is preparing the ground where you will be planting. This means it's time for the physical labor part. You will begin by tilling the ground either using a tiller or a yard fork. Once that is done you will be required to start pulling the weeds, grass and removing rocks. To make the weed and grass removal successful you should perform the initial removal, then go back a couple of weeks later and remove any weeds and grass which have grown up in the meantime.

Other options are using a raised bed or containers to make your organic garden. Raised beds is the way to go if your existing soil isn't up to par and you would like to start planting right away. Construct your bed in any shape you like, using materials like brick, untreated wood, or stone as a border. Don't make the bed too wide (you will need to reach the middle), and be sure the border - and therefore the depth - is 16 inches high to allow roots to grow. Fill the bed with soil and compost.

Container gardening is key if you lack a backyard, With the exception of some root crops and asparagus, most vegetables grow just fine in them, Tomatoes, green onions, pepper, beans, lettuce, and squash all fare particularly well. Look for varieties that are bred to grow in confined spaces, such as patio tomatoes etc. As for what size container you need, Michael Guerra, preagriculture expert suggests using large ones. Large containers allow for companion planting and greater reserves of food and water. Small pots dry out quickly and don't allow space for roots to grow. Whatever size you choose, make sure the container has holes at its base to allow for drainage.

When choosing what to grow you should consider the following:

Seeds VS. Seedlings:

Seeds are cheap and come in a diverse range of varieties, but you may need to start them indoors at least a few weeks before the last frost date - the date when chances are slim to none that the ground will freeze again. This may mean as early as March. Seedlings can be planted directly in your garden. Each vegetable has its own set of instructions, you'll find basic planting guidelines on the seed packets, or for seedlings, ask the garden center.

Companion Plants:

When placed in proximity, some companion plants actually help their neighbors grow by enriching the soil and repelling pests, which helps you avoid fertilizers and pesticides. Companion plants, especially nectar-rich sunflowers, can attract beneficial insects. These "good bugs" which includes ladybugs, lacewings, and ground beetles, feast on the "bad bug" (slugs, aphids, mites) that destroy plants.

Quality, not Quantity:

While you want to plant a little more than you'll need - garden pests, disease, or poor germination may cut into you harvest - overdo it and you'll have too much on your plate. A zucchini plant, for instance, can produce 3 to 9 pounds of fruit in a single season, and while this vegetable is indeed delicious, there's only so much of it you can eat and give away.

Tending To Your Garden

Mulch:

Mulch is anything that is applied to the soil surface to cut down on weeding, watering and to stabilize temperature. Almost any kind will work from autumn leaves to newspaper, even black plastic. A mulch made of organic matter, such as hay, grass clippings, or tree bark will slowly decompose, providing additional nutrients to the soil while improving its structure. Make sure you thoroughly weed your planting area before spreading mulch, and take extra care not to place anything on top of seeds or seedlings.

Water:

Most plants require about an inch of water a week, whether it comes from the hose or from rainfall. New plants, plants beginning to yield fruit or vegetables, and shallow-rooted species require more moisture, those in shady areas can get by with less.

A soaker hose, which has small pores that allow water to gently seep out, provides an effective, ecofriendly way to satisfy thirsty plants. It conserves water and keeps plant leaves dry, making them less susceptible to fungus. If you use a regular garden hose, be sure to soak the soil thoroughly, aiming for the ground, not the foliage. Water in the morning or late afternoon instead of midday, when the sun is highest, as most of the water will evaporate.

Weed:

While you can find organic herbicides for sale at garden stores, your best strategy is the old-fashioned way; pulling weeds out by hand. Get them early before they establish themselves, and make sure you grab the roots along with the leaves. At the end of the season, once the cooler months of autumn start to roll around and your plants have given forth all their fruit, it's time to pull them out and prepare the garden for the winter

It is recommended to spread a layer of compost of well-rotten manure on the ground after the plants have been pulled out. Both dressings will work themselves into the soil as it goes through the cycles of freeze and thaw in the cooler months. When the spring comes, a light raking will help mix them in further and you're ready to go for another season.

Advantages to Organic Gardening:

- Enjoy a wide diversity of garden insects, birds, and mammals otherwise affected by artificial gardens and pesticide use.
- No need to buy, store, mix water or spray potentially dangerous chemicals - even professionals with protective clothing have been affected.
- Organic food tastes great - well balanced soils produce strong healthy plants that become nourishing food for people.
- Save money having your own organic garden. If you think about the vegetables that you use often and how much you are spending at the grocery store, by having your own supply of vegetables at your disposal you will be able to save your money and put it toward something else that you like.

Organic Gardening Quiz

1) Organic gardening is planting gardens without using synthetic fertilizers and pesticides for controlling bug?

True or False

2) The organic products you can buy at the grocery store are always 100% organic?

True or False

3) Seedlings are cheap and may need to start growing indoors first?

True or False

4) A mulch made of organic matter will slowly decompose, providing additional nutrients to the soil?

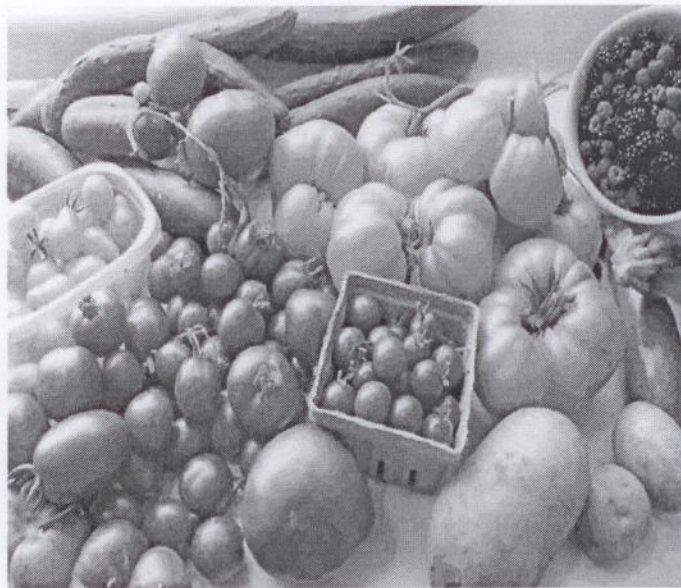
True or False

5) Organic gardening can save you money in the long run?

True or False

6) Sunflowers attract the “bad bugs” and therefore are not a good choice as a companion plant?

True or False



Answers to Quiz

- 1) True
- 2) False - some products may say organic but are not actually grown organically
- 3) False - Seeds are cheap and may need to start growing indoors. Seedlings can be planted right into the ground.
- 4) True
- 5) True
- 6) False - Sunflowers attract the “good bugs” and are a great companion plant for your organic garden.