

Gardening Organically

There is a renewed interest in getting back to basics. Individuals, corporations and governments are focused on finding ways to preserve our natural resources. One way of protecting our environment, and enjoying the best nature has to offer, is by gardening organically.

There are few differences between 'regular' gardening and choosing to garden organically. Planting methods are virtually the same. In both types of gardens, plants will have the same soil, sunlight and water requirements. The big difference lies in the control of weeds, insects and disease. In gardening organically, no chemical or synthetic herbicides, pesticides or fertilizers are used. Organic gardening may also result in a more in-depth tending to plants and soil.

Planting an organic garden begins with soil preparation. For the soil to be productive, organic material must be added. Compost is essential to success in gardening organically, as it promotes the health and well being of the plants. You can easily create your own organic compost by saving and mixing fruit and vegetable scraps, fallen leaves, pruned flowers, grass clippings and manure. Ideally, the compost will be dark and sweet smelling, and full of productive earthworms. In gardening organically, you may find that your soil needs more natural nutrients than compost alone can provide. A soil test will indicate the pH balance. If more nutrients are required you can incorporate natural additives like greensand, rock phosphates and bone meal.

Weeds

A particularly frustrating and annoying problem with gardening organically is weeds. Laying organic mulch can provide a natural weed barrier. Layers of construction paper, cardboard or newspaper under the mulch provides added protection. Some organic gardeners swear by spreading corn meal gluten early in the season before planting, as this slows the growth of weeds. Solarization is another option. If you want to get down and dirty with your weeds, roll up your sleeves for some hoeing and hand pulling. Persistence will pay off in your battle against weeds. Use organic mulches and remove what you can by hand. It may take a few seasons, but it is possible to beat the weeds for good.

Insects

If there is one area that tests even the most rigidly organic gardener, it's the need for pesticides. Insects can seriously harm a plant and, if left uncontested, can wipe out entire crops. Gardening organically does not allow the use of synthetic or chemical pesticides, so your best defense is to take preventative measures. Keep your plants at optimal health and be sure that the soil is not too wet, or too dry. Insects will attack unhealthy plants, but if your crop is healthy it can often outgrow minor insect damage. Keep many different varieties in your garden. If pests wipe out one type of plant, they won't necessarily take over the entire garden. The best way to defend against insects when gardening organically is to introduce natural predators to the area. Entice frogs, lizard, birds and ladybugs by keeping a fresh water supply available. Growing plants to attract insects that feed on nectar can also help, and you can use plant collars, barriers or sticky traps. Household items such as garlic, hot pepper and insecticide soaps can also help you beat the bugs.

Disease

Gardening organically can make it tricky to avoid and combat plant disease. The best thing you can do is to choose disease resistant varieties, and plant them in their prime conditions. Constant moisture and poor air circulation will cause plant diseases to spread. Knowing where to plant your garden and how often to water it will help keep your organic garden disease-free.

Tending a garden is a wonderful hobby, and gardening organically is particularly rewarding. The plants you grow will be chemical free and naturally healthy. You are what you eat, so having a chemical-free garden is ideal for those growing fruit and vegetable crops. While it may take a little extra time and effort, gardening organically is the best choice for you, your plants, and the environment.