

Organic gardening gains popularity

By Barbara Dikty
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People who are interested in growing vegetables that are nutritious, flavorful and more nutritious than supermarket varieties are trying organic gardening.

Organic gardening isn't a new idea, it's around ever since man stuck his first spade into the soil. Only since the turn of the century has man started using chemicals on crops.

Now people are turning back to organic methods after seeing what the addition of chemicals does to their land and to their health. Organic gardening is cooperating with nature, and when you help, instead of oppose, the yields from your garden can be enormous.

running a lawnmower back and forth over them.

A compost pile is another good way to add nutrients and organic matter to your soil, and it's also a way to recycle garbage. To make a compost pile, first make some sort of enclosure so the material doesn't slop all over the ground. Window screening nailed to some boards works well.

First, pile on a layer of leaves, grass clippings, weeds, table scraps, and any other organic materials, then add a layer of manure, (bloodmeal may be substituted for manure but less is needed) then leaves again, then wood ash. Repeat, ending up with a layer of leaves on the top of the pile. During the layering, continuously add water to the pile being sure not to add too much.



Cooperate with nature for large yields

The first thing to do when starting a garden is to find out what kind of soil it is. Is it sandy? Then it will drain well, but it may be too well. Is it claylike or heavily compacted? Then it will retain too much water. In either case, plenty of organic matter worked into the soil will help correct the problem.

Next, find out your soil's pH. You can do this by using a soil test kit. Buy one at a gardening store. It's important to know the pH because if the soil is too acid or too alkaline it can stunt a plant's growth. Also, some plants prefer a soil that is more acidic or alkaline than may be normal in your garden.

To make soil more alkaline, add wood ash to it.

Apply five to ten lbs. per hundred square feet to correct most imbalances.

To make soil less alkaline, work in as much green matter as you can find. Adding fish meal, fish meal, cottonseed meal or manure will not only make it more acidic but will serve as a long term fertilizer.

To build up soil, whether it be too sandy, too compacted or claylike, add organic matter.

Grass clippings, pine needles, and shredded leaves work well. If a shredder is not available, leaves can be shredded by spreading a thick layer over the driveway and then

Let the pile sit and compost for about a month. If the inside of the pile feels hot to the touch, the pile is composting. The organic matter is actually cooking itself. The temperature inside a compost pile gets up to 160 degrees F. When the pile cools down, the compost is ready for use.

It's when the plants come up that the real problems begin. Bugs arrive at a gallop to demolish seedlings, and they will, unless they are stopped. There are three main ways to protect plants; safe insecticides, companion planting, and biological controls.

The safe insecticides are rotenone and pyrethrum. Be sure to use them only when absolutely necessary, as overspraying can damage plants.

Companion planting is a favorite method. It involves using plants which repel various insects by their smells or confusing them by their colors.

Marigolds and nasturtiums will ward off aphids and root nematodes. Spearmint and peppermint will repel flea beetles, cabbage butterflies and others.

Plant horseradish to repel potato bugs and other flying insects. Plant onion and garlic as a general deterrent.

The third way to control insects is to use biological controls. Using bugs to con-

trol bugs. Praying mantises are good insects to have, they're an all around predator. They eat Japanese beetles, white grubs, earworms and others. Ladybugs eat scale insects, mites, aphids, egg cases and small insects. Tiny trichogramma wasps attack caterpillars and lepidoptera. Lacewing eat aphids, eggs, and soft bodied insects.

And finally, keep a gardening notebook. Record any problems, solutions and results. A good gardener learns from his mistakes, and there are plenty of those! But there's always enough rewards to make gardening worthwhile the next year, and the next year and the ---.

To improve the chances of seeds germinating and growing into edible vegetables here are six short steps to follow:

Stretch string between stakes set at ends of row to keep rows straight.

Make a furrow with hoe handle, adjusting depth to seed which will be planted.

Sow seed thinly by shaking seed from a cut corner of package or by dropping from fingers. Fine seeds can be mixed with sand to reduce wastage.

Use a corner of the hoe to draw soil over seed; do not allow clods or stones to cover seed.

To hasten germination, firm soil above seed. On heavy soils water rows before planting to facilitate germination and to make crusting less severe.

To provide room for growth, thin young plants. Also thin root crops such as beets and carrots early before tap roots become fleshy.



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