

Organic Gardening: Why Not?

Contributed by Webmaster
Saturday, 25 October 2008
Last Updated Saturday, 25 October 2008

By Louanne Baelde

Organic gardening is growing and marketing health foods that have not been treated with commercial chemicals. Only natural fertilizers and pest repellents are used to qualify for the higher, health food prices.

The primary equipment for health food growing is to not use the chemical fertilizers or toxic pesticides. Natural and organically grown foods command higher prices because they cannot easily be mass-produced and generally require more TLC.

Not only are natural foods more expensive, they are mandatory for people who cannot tolerate many of the chemicals commonly used by the majority of growers today. There are also many people today who feel very strongly about chemicals and are willing to pay extra for all natural products.

The organic grower screens pests from the garden, uses insect repelling plants (like marigolds) and natural enemy insects (praying mantis, ladybugs) and natural, nontoxic pesticides to reduce crop damage.

Some organic growers confine their operation to green houses or shade houses, where control is easier.

Natural foods include fresh fruit and vegetables, dried, frozen or canned foods, as well as seeds, powders and juices.

They can be sold through health stores, directly from your garden roadside stands, or to markets in the area. It is also important to note that processed natural foods are equally as much in demand.

When advertising your organically grown produce, be sure to emphasize the "all natural" aspects, which is one of your best selling points.

Setting up to grow health foods is very much like readying a normal garden, except that you take special care to avoid the use of "forbidden" chemicals.

Fertilizers are restricted to barnyard products and natural plant leftovers which can be combined into an excellent (and low cost) garden fertilizer.

In the natural food garden business, you will soon develop a routine to make your own compost almost exclusively from waste products, plant trimmings, and fruit hulls. All plant parts that are not otherwise used (or diseased) are recycled into compost, along with other materials that you have on hand or can buy inexpensively.

The degree of isolation needed for an organic garden depends on its location. If you live in a hot area, consider a shade

cloth enclosure to screen insects as well as the direct rays of a hot sun.

Greenhouse enclosures are often used in the more temperate areas where frost is a consideration.

If your garden is in a relatively insect free and not down wind from fields that are sprayed with commercial chemicals, you may need no special considerations other than some of the accepted insect deterring techniques.

Perhaps the most needed assistance for your organic garden will be compost, which is sometimes called (ironically) artificial fertilizer.

The purpose is to fertilize and simultaneously, add humus (decayed animal and plant matter) to your growing medium.

Depending on the needs of your soil, it may be necessary to add specifics to attain the desired composition.

If you cannot test it yourself, take several small samples from different locations in your garden and have them analyzed.

State universities and some large (especially, chain) nurseries will often provide this service at little or no charge. Call your county agriculture agent to find other sources of soil analysis (and remedial actions that may be unique to your area).

In a commercial operation, you will undoubtedly want to generate at least some of your own compost. You should have at least two compost piles so you can be using one while the other is "working."

One way to build an inexpensive compost box is to make an enclosure of wood and chicken wire, some 3 feet wide, 15 feet long and perhaps 4 feet high.

Use metal or treated for the four corners and re-enforcing posts every 3-4 feet on the sides. There should be no bottom (just bare soil).

Add the compost materials: dry leaves, grass clippings, cotton hulls, straw, fruit peelings, sawdust, vegetables, and manure (clean sacked is fine) in one foot layers.

Kitchen scraps are usually avoided because they give off odors and attract flies, as are any diseased plant parts. Mix in a shovel full of regular garden soil here and there, along with some hybrid earthworms if available.

Between layers, sprinkle well with some 8-8-8 or 5-10-5 commercial fertilizer (about a pound per square foot of compost surface).

This small amount of commercial chemical doesn't count as a directly applied chemical. It acts as a catalyst to speed the decomposing action.

Keep the compost pile moist and use a fork to turn and stir the material every few days to help foster decomposition. Add more clippings as the pile shrinks (decomposes).

When restarting a compost pile always leave a couple inches of the old compost on the ground to act as "starter". Depending on the weather and how well you take care of your compost pile, it should be "ready" in 6 to 8 weeks. Of course, if you use heavier products, such as wood that has gone through a compost machine, it will take a little longer.

Tip: If you can't afford a compost machine, put leaves and other small clippings into a clean metal garbage can and insert your weed-eater. This won't work with larger pieces, but does fine with the light material.

Another idea is to mount a barrel so it can be turned daily. Have one made with a door and good latch so it can be turned without its contents falling out. The barrel can either be mounted on rollers or have axles welded on each end and fit into receptacles on a sturdy stand.

Organic gardeners learn which insects and garden denizens are helpers and which are "bad news". Some may look bad but do a lot of good.

Examples are garden snakes that eat mice and insects, spiders and eat insects, wasps that eat roach eggs and lay their eggs in insects, dragon flies, and ground beetles and caterpillars. Other beneficial creatures may be more easily recognized: praying mantis (insects and aphids), ladybugs (aphids, scales, spider mites), bees (pollination), lizards (large quantities of insects), frogs, toads (ditto), pirate bugs (mites, eggs and larvae of other insects), birds (worms, bugs), dragonflies (flies, mosquitoes, etc.).

There are also "organic" pesticides that are used, but one must be very careful not to step over the line to toxic chemicals and lose their "organically grown" label!

As you learn more and more about organic gardening, you will discover many other tricks that work in your area. Some are ironclad rules; others may be debatable, but in the final analysis, what works for you is best for you! Some organic gardeners NEVER plant anything in the same row twice, to reduce the possibility of pests and disease.

For example: Tomatoes are especially sensitive to nematodes (root insects) as well as tomato worms. A crop of tomatoes may be followed by onions or cereal (not regular winter) rye for a winter green fertilizer (turned) under in the spring).

The latter is reputed to kill nematodes which become tangled in the thick rye roots. Many organic gardeners routinely place marigolds and other insect repelling plants between rows and/or 5 castor beans to help repel flies and moles.

By subscribing to a good organic gardening magazine, and trial and error in your particular locale, you will soon become an expert for the products you raise.

Louanne welcomes you to visit EZ-Gardening-Tips.com <http://www.EZ-Gardening-Tips.com> for a large data base of extremely helpful gardening articles, gardening videos and gardening resources.

Gardening

{mos_sb_discuss:2}