

7-Step Guide to Organic Gardening

More and more people are choosing organic gardening methods because they no longer want to use toxic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides around their children and pets, and do not want to poison our environment. But there is another reason to go organic – it works! Organic gardening methods work in *cooperation* with the complex science of nature to enhance the health and growth of our plants. Organic gardening methods give our plants just what they need, increasing productivity and pest resistance in our landscapes, gardens, and lawns. **The main principles behind organics are simple!**

Follow these steps for a healthier, more beautiful garden and landscape.

Have questions? Just ask us!

1. Start with compost.

Compost improves soil texture, permeability, drainage, as well as fertilizer and water-holding capacity. High quality compost also adds nutrients and beneficial microorganisms. These microbes make nutrients available to plants and can help prevent diseases.

- When planting **trees and shrubs**, mix in a good quality compost or garden soil to the backfill as needed. Be sure to amend an area at least twice as wide as the rootball, but no deeper than the rootball.
- On **lawns**, add ¼” to ½” of good quality compost on top every spring and/or fall; water in.
- Add 1” to 2” on top of **flower & vegetable beds** & over the root zones of **trees and shrubs**.
- To create **new flower and vegetable beds**, mix in up to 50 % compost with the native soil.
- Wherever new soil is needed for **new gardens, raised beds, or large planters**, use a weed-free, compost-rich garden soil.
- Whenever planting in **containers**, use a good quality potting soil. When planting **seeds**, use a seed starter.
- For a quick boost of beneficial microbes, nutrients, enzymes, & more, spray **compost tea**.

We have many composts and compost-rich soils from which to choose, along with compost tea.

Compost – Refresh existing soil, loosens and aerates.

Garden Soil – New soil for raised beds/ planters and pots > 20 gal.

Potting Soil – New soil for containers < 20 gal.

2. Use only organic fertilizers, amendments, and supplements.

- Studies conducted by Texas A&M University, with the City of Austin Grow Green Program, proved that **organic fertilizers** outperformed others in producing better “color and density.” It was proven also that organic fertilizers do not pollute our groundwater as synthetics do.
- **Liquid Soil Activators** stimulate microbes, improve soil texture, and help remove salt and toxin build-up.
- **Seaweed** contains trace minerals and plant growth stimulators. Drench new transplants to stimulate rooting. Foliar feed tomatoes to promote flowering and fruit set. Drench and/or foliar feed any plant to improve cold hardiness, increase heat tolerance, and help prevent diseases and pests. There are numerous products on the market that contain seaweed.

Dry

Nitrogen for leafy growth

Phosphorus for flowers and fruit

Potassium **K** for nutrient transport within the plant and many other things!

Liquid

Fish Fertilizer

Liquid Seaweed

Soil Activators

Mycorrhizal Inoculants

3. Mulch bare soil.

Mulching 2 or 3 inches deep helps to prevent weeds, conserves moisture, regulates soil temperature, and helps prevent disease. Avoid piling mulch onto the stems of plants.

Texas Native Mulch

Pine Straw Mulch

Any aged plant material free of weed seeds (avoid live oak & pecan leaves)

4. Choose native and well-adapted plants.

Native and well-adapted plants are easier to maintain, use less water, and are less prone to disease and insect attack. Reduce the size of the lawn, especially St. Augustine, and plant more trees, shrubs, hardy perennials, ornamental grasses, and groundcovers. Consult with our staff, and the following resources for more information.

Native Texas Plants by Sally & Andy Wasowski

Plants for Texas by Howard Garrett

Gardening Success With Difficult Soils by Scott Ogden

Garden Guide for Austin and Vicinity

by Travis County Master Gardener Association

Grow Green: Native & Adapted Landscape Plants

free booklet (www.growgreen.org)

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

www.wildflower.org

5. Water carefully.

Using native plants and mulching properly greatly reduces the amount of water needed in the landscape. For most established plants, it is better to water deeply and less frequently than shallowly and often. Along with mulch, consider the following products for more efficient watering.

Drip irrigation

Soaker hoses

Sprinklers

Hand watering equipment

6. Control weeds organically.

Most weeds grow best in poor soil. Improving soil texture and fertility and adding compost can thwart weeds. Also, weeds can't get a foothold if bare soil is mulched. For better weed control, ask about the following products and references.

20% Vinegar weed control

Orange Oil based weed killer

Corn Gluten pre-emergent herbicide

Resources

Weeds, Control Without Poisons

book by Charles Walters

Weed Control info sheet

7. Preserve beneficial organisms

Beneficial soil microorganisms, as well as visible critters like earthworms, support vigorous plant growth and can even ward off diseases. Beneficial insects and other wildlife, such as ladybugs, lacewings, ground beetles, spiders, lizards, birds, wasps, and garden snakes, help to keep pest insect populations in check. *Learn to identify garden allies and protect them!* Do this by avoiding chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and *using even organic pesticides sparingly, if at all.* Identify the difference between beneficial and pest species with the help of the following resources.

Texas Bug Book

book by Howard Garrett and Malcolm Beck

A Field Guide to Common Texas Insects

book by Drees & Jackman

Grow Green: Earth-wise Guide to Beneficial Insects

free handout (www.growgreen.org)

Natural Gardener Beneficial Insect Hand Out

8. Enjoy the fruits of your Labor!

Pick and enjoy all your amazing organic fruits and veggies! The below websites have seasonal recipes for Texas.

Edible Austin - www.edibleaustin.com

Texas Farms Market - www.texasfarmsmarket.org

The Natural Gardener Free Classes www.tngaustin.com