

CARING FOR PLANTS ORGANICALLY

A Guide to Green City Living



EVERGREEN

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Water Saving Tips:

- Water your plants with grey-water (used dish, bath or laundry water), or water left over from cooking, tea, etc.
- Set up a rain barrel, or scatter buckets in the garden during a heavy rainfall.
- Conserve moisture by mulching around each plant.



Maintaining your garden organically will keep it growing happily throughout the season without negatively impacting your local environment. Check on your garden as often as possible: pull weeds as soon as they come up, add mulch where it's thin, water when it's dry, look for signs of pests and diseases, and check for produce that's ready to harvest.

Watering

- Most gardens don't need more than 1 inch of water per week. Young seedlings require shallow, more frequent watering while established plants require deeper watering weekly. Let the soil dry out before watering to encourage deeper root systems.
- Water in early morning or late afternoon—avoid mid-day sun! Water only at the base of the plant, gently and close to the soil. Avoid getting water on the leaves.
- Assess how much water your plants are getting using a rain gauge, or stick your finger deeply in the soil (the soil should be moist to the tip of your finger, as surface soil is not an indicator).

Fertilizing

Organic Fertilizers help build a healthy soil system, which in turn produces healthy, vigorous plants without harming the surrounding ecosystem.

Start by working nutrient-rich compost into the bed as you prepare it for planting each year. Get to know your plants, and learn to identify the signs of nutrient deficiencies; a nitrogen deficiency will slow growth down and often cause older leaves to turn yellow, while remaining foliage is often light green.

If a plant shows signs of a deficiency, small amounts of the appropriate nutrient may be added to the soil once every two weeks. Be careful not to over-fertilize! Too little is better than too much. When in doubt, use a fertilizer with balanced nutrients, such as finished compost or worm castings.



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Tip:

Install large and heavy stakes, trellises, tepees and other sturdy supports while preparing your planting beds to avoid disturbing roots. Lightweight supports (small stakes & string) can be installed after your garden has been planted.



Organic Fertilizers: What's Available?

For Balanced Nutrients (NPK=Nitrogen/Phosphorus/Potassium):

Use finished compost, worm castings, or a multi-purpose organic fertilizer (commercially available) including blood, fish and bone meal.

Add Nitrogen: Use manure, (different types have varying levels of nutrients, so be careful) add coffee grinds to your compost or directly to the soil, or plant a fertilizing cover crop ("green manure"). Green manure crops include borage, legumes, and other nitrogen-fixing plants.

Add Potassium: Use rock potash (10.5% potassium), seaweed meal or liquid seaweed (2.3% Potassium + trace minerals). To add Potassium over time, work wood ash into your soil regularly.

Add Phosphorus: Use bone meal (20% to 30% phosphorus) or rock phosphate (approximately 2 to 4lbs. of rock phosphate for every 100-sq-ft of ground, or approximately 2.5lbs added to 25lbs. of compost).

Supporting Vegetables

Many vegetables or flowers will collapse under their own weight if they are not provided with support. Training your plants to grow vertically will keep them off the ground and away from pests, while also saving valuable garden space.

Stakes: Drive a simple stake or pole into the soil near the base of the plant, and the vines will instinctively latch onto them. Tie the stems of tall or heavy plants to the stake for support.

Tepee Trellises: Tepees make excellent supports for beans, peas, tomatoes, and heavy-fruited crops such as squash. Use three to six poles that have been cut 10–12 feet long, and tie them together at the top. Place the bundle over the top of the planting area, separate the poles, (ideally so they're next to the base of your plants) and stick the poles 1–2 feet into the ground.

Fence Trellises: Drive a post into the ground at each end of a row, placing other posts along the row as needed. Connect the posts with lighter support materials such as string, twine, netting or wire mesh.

Cages: Contain sprawlers such as cucumbers and tomatoes by caging them. A simple cage can be constructed from scrap wood or sturdy wire mesh. Round or square cages two to three feet in diameter and three to four feet high will contain a variety of vines.



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Pruning and Pinching

Many vegetable and fruit plants respond well to pruning or pinching. By removing some branches, and promoting a particular pattern of growth, you can give your plants better access to light and air, and help them fend off disease, resulting in bigger, healthier fruit.

PRUNING

In addition to promoting healthy growth, pruning can help remedy a range of problems:

- **Excess foliage and little fruit:** using sharp bypass pruning shears, make an angled cut close to where the branch meets the main stem. Removing fruitless branches will direct energy towards fruit production.
- **Abnormal height with sparse foliage:** Often referred to as being “leggy,” cut growing stems back to the first or second branch to promote dense, compact growth and flower production.
- **Infection or infestation:** prune away the affected foliage and discard or burn it. Sterilize your pruning shears between each cut by cleaning them with isopropyl alcohol.

PINCHING

Pinching off buds, flowers or immature fruit can help encourage growth and fruiting in many herbs and vegetables.

- For fruit-bearing vegetables, pinch off a third to one-half of the flowers as they appear. The remaining fruit will be larger and will mature more quickly.
- After fruit has set, pinch away any fruit that crowds, is deformed or diseased, or receives limited light and air circulation.
- Pinch away all foliage in contact with, or surrounding the fruit.

Using Companion Plants

Companion plants, when planted near one another, can help attract beneficial insects, ward off pests, and encourage healthy plant growth. Just as some plants affect each other positively, other plant combinations can limit the growth of one another in some way. For example, when tomatoes and corn are planted together, they tend to compete for nutrients and attract the same kind of harmful worm. Getting to know your plants and observing which ones grow well together can be a great way to encourage healthy growth and manage pests and disease the organic way.

For more information and a quick guide to companion plants visit:
<http://www.companionplanting.net/>



Harvesting

To get the fullest flavour from fruits and veggies, harvest just before they reach maturity. With every minute that passes after produce is picked, quality and food value decrease, so bring them in from the garden just before you plan to eat or process them.

- Some vegetables can be picked and used before they are completely mature. Try young onions, beets, carrots, cabbages, and the leaves of head lettuce that has not yet formed heads.
- The more you harvest, the more you grow. If you don't pick lettuce it will go to seed. Chard and other heat tolerant plants can be cut continuously all summer long.
- Crops that are harvested latest in the season are the easiest and best to store. Eat your first harvestings of beets and carrots in the summer months, and plan to save the second harvest for canning and freezing.

Want to Know More?

- 1) *How to Grow More Vegetables than You Ever Thought Possible on Less Land than You Can Imagine.* John Jeavons. Ten Speed Press. 2004.
- 2) *The New Organic Grower – A Master's Manual of Tools and Techniques for the Home and Market Gardener.* Eliot Coleman. Chelsea Green. 2005.
- 3) *The New Self-Sufficient Gardener: The Complete Guide to Planning, Growing, Storing and Preserving your own Garden Produce.* John Seymour. DK Publishing. 2008.

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