

The
THE
Natural
GARDENER

7-Step Guide to Organic Gardening

More and more people are choosing organic gardening methods because they no longer want to use toxic 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, 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.
- 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, in bags and/or bulk.

Lady Bug Revitalizer Compost
Lady Bug All-American Turkey Compost
Lady Bug Farm Style Compost
Lady Bug Hill Country Garden Soil
Lady Bug Rose Magic Soil Blend
Lady Bug Vortex Potting Soil
Lady Bug Square Foot Gardening Blend
Aerobically-brewed Compost Tea

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 hormones. 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. **Lady Bug John’s Recipe**, **Lady Bug Terra Tonic**, and **Medina Plus** all contain seaweed, along with the original Maxicrop Seaweed.

Lady Bug 8-2-4 Lawn & Garden Fertilizer
Lady Bug Garden Pep Cottonseed Meal

Lady Bug Flower Power
Rabbit Hill Buds & Blooms

Lady Bug Glittering Greensand
Rabbit Hill Minerals Plus

Lady Bug John’s Recipe
Alaska or Neptune’s Harvest Fish Fertilizers
Maxicrop Seaweed and Seaweed plus Iron

Lady Bug Terra Tonic
Medina Soil Activators
...and many more organic options!

Organic Gardening Works!

3. Mulch bare soil.

Mulching at least 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
Shredded Cedar Mulch
Landscapers' Mulch
Pine Bark Mulch
Pine Straw Mulch
Lady Bug Sylvan Formula Mulch

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 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)
Visit Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
& their website www.wildflower.org



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5. Water carefully.

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

Soaker hoses
Submatic drip irrigation systems
Dramm water equipment

6. Control weeds organically.

Most weeds grow best in poor soil. Improving soil texture and fertility and adding manure 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.

Green-Go weed killer
Garden Weasel Crabgrass Killer
Corn Gluten pre-emergent herbicide
Weed barrier cloth
Weeds, Control Without Poisons
by Charles Walters

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
by Howard Garrett and Malcolm Beck
A Field Guide to Common Texas Insects
by Drees & Jackman
Grow Green: Earth-wise Guide to Beneficial Insects
free handout (www.growgreen.org)