

Flora & Fauna

Organic Gardening

Once thought to be just some passing hippie fad, gardeners all across the country are shifting their gardening approach to be more organic. They’re abandoning chemicals and synthetic products in favor of natural solutions for a more healthy and productive garden.

Organically grown produce isn’t necessarily more nutritious, it just has less pesticide residue and fewer growth hormones, making it safer to eat. Organic gardening can also be a lot cheaper since you won’t be spending money on pesticides and fertilizers, and instead be relying on natural solutions and successful techniques that almost let your garden do the gardening for you.

Here are a few tips to help you make your garden more organic this season:

- **Companion planting.** It makes a difference which plants you put next to one another. Some plants replenish nutrients lost by others, some sun-lovers provide shade for those that need it, and some combinations effectively keep pests and critters away. For example, you should plant basil next to tomatoes to improve growth and flavor. Basil also helps to repel flies and mosquitoes. Marigolds should be planted next to zucchini to repel squash bugs.
- **Use compost.** By mixing compost (whether homemade or store-bought) into the soil before planting, you’re adding essential nutrients that will feed plants throughout the growing season. Healthier soil leads to healthier plants that can better withstand disease and insect damage.
- **Attract the right pests.** Ladybugs are one of the most beneficial garden insects. They not only consume up to 50-60 aphids per day, but they also eat a variety of other insects and larvae including scales, mealy bugs, leaf hoppers, mites, and various types of soft-bodied insects. You can attract them to your garden with nectar-producing plants such as parsley, dill, and fennel.
- **Water the right way.** There’s something satisfying about watering a garden, but did you know there’s a right and wrong way to do it? It’s typically better to water in the morning to help avoid powdery mildew and other fungal diseases that are often spread by high humidity. It’s also better to water deeply and thoroughly. Frequent, shallow watering actually trains your plants to keep their roots near the surface, making them less hardy and more likely to suffer when deprived of water.
- **Mulch wisely.** To keep dirt off lettuce and cabbage leaves, spread a 1-2 inch layer of mulch (untreated by pesticides or fertilizers) around each plant. This also helps keep the weeds down.



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Cleaning Corner **Tidying Up the Toy Box**

1. Dump all toys out of the box.
2. Vacuum and wipe the inside with an antibacterial cleanser such as Lysol®.
3. Take this opportunity to get rid of broken pieces and toys with missing parts.
4. Collect all the toys your child has outgrown and donate them to a local charity or shelter.
5. Wash any frequently used stuffed toys in the washing machine using the gentle cycle.
6. Disinfect any plastic toys by putting them in the dishwasher, or wash them in the kitchen sink. Fill the sink with 1-2 gallons of water and add just 1-2 teaspoons of bleach (adding more bleach won’t get toys cleaner). Be sure to rinse each toy thoroughly and pat dry with a paper towel.
7. Don’t forget about other toy collection areas outside the toy box – behind the couch, underneath car seats, the back of closets, etc.

June

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| 1693 | The first ever woman’s magazine, <i>The Ladies’ Mercury</i> , is published in London |
| 1835 | P. T. Barnum and his circus begin their first tour of the United States |
| 1882 | The electric iron is patented by Henry W. Seely, in New York, NY |
| 1897 | Mark Twain, responding to rumors that he was dead at age 61, is quoted by the New York Journal as saying: “The report of my death was an exaggeration.” |
| 1949 | The first 12 women graduate from Harvard Medical School |
| 1955 | The first automobile seat belt legislation in America is enacted in Illinois |
| 1989 | 14-year-old Scott Isaacs spells “spoliator” to win the 1989 National Spelling Bee |

Health Advice: What You Need to Know about Skin Cancer

More than 1 million Americans are diagnosed with skin cancer each year. In fact, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation, skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. Most Americans think they know how to protect themselves: wear sunscreen, wear a hat, seek shady spots, don't smoke, avoid tanning booths, and keep a watchful eye on moles. While this is all good advice that everyone should put into practice, there are some other things you should keep in mind to protect yourself.

- **Follow the ABCDEs of Skin Cancer Detection:**

- **A – Asymmetry.** Normal moles or freckles are completely symmetrical, meaning you could draw a line down the middle and both halves would look the same. In cases of skin cancer, however, spots will not look the same on both sides.
- **B – Border.** An irregular, blurry, or jagged border around a spot is a characteristic of cancer.
- **C – Color.** Normal moles and spots are one color throughout. Suspicious moles have more than one hue such as black, red, white, or blue.
- **D – Diameter.** Any moles or spots larger than a pencil eraser (about 1/4 inch across) should be examined by a doctor. This includes any spots that do not have other abnormalities such as color, border, or asymmetry.
- **E – Elevation.** This refers to any moles or spots that are raised above the surface and have an uneven texture.

- **Look for more than moles:**

The ABCDEs apply only to pigmented moles. You should also alert your doctor to any lesions, flesh colored moles, or odd lumps that could be precancerous growths.

- **Look “where the sun don't shine”:**

While exposure to ultraviolet light is a leading cause of skin cancer, sometimes the disease can develop in well-covered areas such as the groin or buttocks. Among women in particular, genital skin cancers have proved deadlier than similar lesions found elsewhere on the body, perhaps because they often go undetected.

- **Pay attention to genetics:**

Individuals of African and Asian descent are most often affected by a form of melanoma that manifests in unexpected ways: a streak under a nail; a growth in the mouth; or a bruise, mole, or blotch on the palm or sole of the foot. The actual cause of these cancers is unknown, but they are thought to be related to genetics rather than sun exposure.

Kid Corner: Summer Science Experiments

Summer vacation doesn't mean that learning stops until the next school year. Try doing some of these fun science experiments with your kids and see how much you can all learn together!

Make a Rain Gauge

Supplies: A jar with straight sides (such as a spaghetti sauce jar), a ruler, and some rainy days.

Directions: Tape the ruler to the outside of the jar, and then place the jar outside.

Have your child keep track of rainfall on a calendar or in a notebook throughout the summer. What does he/she notice? Are there more rainy days in the beginning of summer, or the end? How about the amount of rain that falls – does more rain fall each day in the beginning, middle, or end of the season?

Create an Egg Carton Window Garden

Supplies: Biodegradable paper egg carton, seeds (such as basil, marigolds, pansies, sunflowers), potting soil, and a sunny window.

Directions: Cut the lid off the carton and add soil to each egg pot (until about three-fourths full). Add the seeds and cover with more soil until the pot is filled. Remind your child to keep the soil moistened – a small, handheld sprayer filled with water works best. When your seedlings are hearty, send your children off to plant the entire carton (which will eventually dissolve completely) in the backyard. You can also use a pair of scissors to cut each pod out so your children can spread the plants all over the backyard.

Make Sidewalk Chalk

Supplies: Plaster of Paris, powdered tempera paint (buy primary colors – yellow, blue, and red – from your local craft and art supply store), and molds such as ice cube trays, toilet paper rolls, paper/plastic cups, or candy molds.

Directions: Mix 1 cup Plaster of Paris with 1 cup of water. Add color using the tempera paints. Invite your children to experiment by mixing the colors (what happens when blue and yellow combine? How about yellow and red?). They can also experiment by making fun swirls in the paint. Once the paint is mixed, pour the mixture inside the molds and let it dry for 24 hours. Then remove it from the mold and let it dry another 24 hours. Then it's time to play hopscotch!

Ingredients:

- 3 eggs
- 1/3 cup flour
- 3 tbsp water
- 1 large eggplant
- 1 cup mozzarella cheese
- 1/3 cup parmesan cheese
- 1/8 tsp salt
- Vegetable or canola oil for frying
- 1 cup of your favorite pasta sauce

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Whisk the eggs in a bowl. Add the flour, water, and salt. Continue to mix until batter is smooth.
3. Slice the eggplant into 1/4-inch thick slices.
4. Fill a large skillet or saucepan with about 1-1½ inches of oil. Heat the oil until a drop of batter bubbles right away.
5. Dip each eggplant slice in the batter and fry in the oil for 2-3 min on each side (until golden brown). Remove and set aside to drain on a paper towel.
6. Spread about 1/2 a cup of pasta sauce in a 9x9-inch baking dish. Layer in half of the eggplant slices and cover with half of the mozzarella and half of the parmesan cheese. Layer in the remaining eggplant, the remainder of the sauce, and the remaining cheese.
7. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 20-30 min, or until cheese is melted through.

The “Mad Apple”

The eggplant is one of the least appreciated vegetables in the Western World. Like the tomato, the eggplant is a member of the Deadly Nightshade family. Whereas the tomato was believed to be poisonous, superstitious Europeans thought the eggplant induced insanity. It was known as the “Mad Apple” until only a few centuries ago. Early varieties of eggplant didn’t look like the giant purple vegetables we eat today. They were in fact small and white, resembling eggs, hence the name.

Helpful Closet Organization Tips

What items are hanging at the very back of your closet? What’s in those hat boxes and bins on the top shelf? If your answer is, “I have no idea,” it’s time to get organized.

1. Keep things visible.

That old adage, “Out of sight, out of mind,” dates back to at least the 13th century and it’s as true today as it was back then. If we don’t see things on a regular basis, we simply forget about them. This is especially applicable to closet organization.

Everything in your closet should be visible, accessible, and, in the case of boxes and bins, clearly labeled. This may mean you need to take the time to empty your closet of clothes you don’t wear and items you don’t use. You may also want to consider investing in some organizational supplies such as shelf dividers, clear plastic bins, belt and tie hangars, and shoe racks to maximize your closet space.

2. Have proper lighting.

This tip goes hand in hand with the first one. If you can’t see what you’ve got, you won’t wear it, so make sure your closet light reaches into all corners. This may mean installing a different light fixture, or purchasing a few inexpensive touch lights that can be easily affixed under shelves and in darker corners.

3. Subdivide clothing by item and color.

Group all your pants together, then all your button-down shirts, then polo shirts, skirts, sweaters, etc. Next, organize each section of clothing by putting your clothes in order of color from lightest to darkest. You’ll be amazed at how much time you’ll save getting ready each morning. Instead of hunting through your closet hangar by hangar, you’ll be able to quickly find what you want and coordinate your outfits.

4. Stack up your stuff.

Use stackable cubes and boxes with pull-out drawers to take advantage of vertical space in your closet, such as the shelf space above your hangars and below your hanging clothes. Clear boxes are preferable so you can easily see what’s inside.

... Carpet Talk...

The best way to keep your carpets cleaner longer is to vacuum on a regular basis. Particles of dry soil get tracked in to your home on shoes, clothing and even gentle summer breezes through open windows. If not removed, they’ll settle deep into the pile of the carpet, actually damaging the fibers and making it look dull, dingy, and dirty!

To do all you can to keep your carpet fresh and looking new, keep these tips in mind:

1) **Go the extra mile when shopping for a vacuum.** Cheap vacuums don’t reach down deep into the carpet fibers, so a great deal of soil is left to accumulate deep down.

2) **Use the correct vacuum tools to care for your floor covering.** Combination beater/brush bars agitate carpet pile and loosen it for deep down dirt and debris removal.

3) **Opt for a paper bag.** Many vacuums today offer bagless technology, which is downright convenient when it comes to disposing the dirt you’ve trapped. However, paper bags that trap particles smaller than two microns in size tend to do a more efficient job. Don’t forget to replace bags when they’re between one-half to two-thirds full for maximum efficiency.

4) **Get the height right.** If your vacuum has an adjustable height mechanism, start at the highest setting then lower it until it just touches the pile. Your vacuum should slightly vibrate carpet. If the brush is set too low, you’ll wind up overworking the motor and possibly needing to purchase a replacement vacuum sooner than expected.



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