

GREEN LIVING

By Cile Downs

Organic Gardening



ORGANIC GARDENING is a term that has been used for decades to mean using natural methods without chemical pesticides, fungicides, herbicides and fertilizers.

The basis of successful ORGANIC GARDENING is COMPOSTING. Every garden, whatever its size, can have a compost heap whether it is only yard waste or includes food waste from your kitchen:

The simplest method is cold composting in which you simply pile up waste materials and allow them to break down over the course of about a year. The breakdown process is facilitated by the addition of manure (chicken manure is easy to handle and easy to get.) Turning with a pitchfork will also accelerate the process but is not absolutely necessary. Since this pile will probably not heat up enough to kill weed seeds or disease pathogens, it is unwise to put pet waste or diseased plants into it. If you do use food waste that includes shellfish shells or meat, for example, you really should fence to keep out animals. (See our article on COMPOSTING.)

MULCH is a layer of material placed on the ground both to protect and enrich the soil and to make cultivation unnecessary. After soil warms up and seedlings are 4"-6" high, mulch can be spread around them. Add to the mulch as needed to keep down weeds. Materials that make good mulch and also provide humus when incorporated with the soil are: Hay, straw, sawdust, grass clippings, wood chips, pine needles, salt hay and seaweed. (See our article on MULCH.)

PROBLEMS:

WEEDS

As stated above, mulch is the perfect solution for weed problems; groundcover is also effective but is best used where it can be a permanent installation. Whenever necessary, just pull up weeds and add them to the compost heap.

INSECTS

Japanese beetles: Milky disease spores.

Aphids: Lady bugs love to eat them; or wash off plants with a strong stream of water.

All other beetles can be picked off plants by hand and thrown into a jar of soapy water.

Rotenone powder or spray is sure death for all beetles.

Tomato Hornworms should be picked off by hand.

Earwigs: Spray with Safer Soap.

DEER and RABBITS

The only real answer to deer or rabbit damage is fencing. Don't be deceived by solutions that work sometimes but are soon ignored by these animals. 3' chicken wire which should be extended into ground several inches to avoid burrowing will keep out rabbits. Against deer in a small garden 6' stock fence is sufficient but in a larger area 7' or 8' deer fencing is necessary.



VOLES

Voles can only be defeated by wire mesh (1/4" or 1/2" galvanized wire mesh) placed either underneath raised beds or lining a trench in which you are going to plant.

PESTICIDE WARNING:

Among the most widely used pesticides are neurotoxins, which work by disrupting the nervous system's structure or functioning. Chlorpyrifos (Dursban), acephate (Orthene), carbaryl (Seven, Deet), pyrethroids (Tempo) are among currently used neurotoxins. Even one exposure to neurotoxic compounds at levels thought to be safe for adults could cause permanent loss of brain function in children. A 1993 study at Mount Sinai showed that women with higher levels of a breakdown product of the pesticide DDT in their blood had a higher chance of developing breast cancer.

We strongly urge that you familiarize yourself with the effects of herbicides and pesticides on human (animal) life and on the beneficial organisms that control pests.