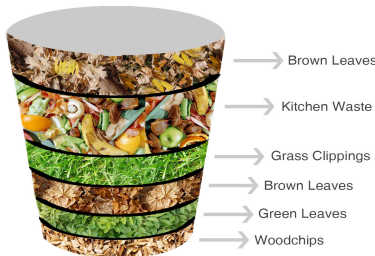


Basic Organic Gardening

By Bettylou Sandy

Bettylousandy18@gmail.com

Manchester, CT



When we observe the natural world around us and start to appreciate the simple order of life in its original form, we often long to incorporate the same process in our own life. Organic gardening helps us to make a significant difference in our own health, by eating better, by getting more exercise and by reducing the amount of chemicals in our environment.

Organic gardening is simply the care of the soil and plant life that grow in your yard, with the most natural conditions employed by nature itself. When we enrich the soil with organic matter, fertilize with only materials from other elements directly from the earth, and plant “natural defenses” within our gardens to attract beneficial bugs and deter problem bugs, we work *with* nature, rather than against it. Organic gardening does not use the synthetic substances as pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers derived from petroleum products, or produced in a laboratory. Those harmful products pollute the soil and our water supply, as well as harming our pets and children. By supporting the soil and the plants with natural nutrition, plants become less susceptible to diseases and other problems.

If organic gardening seems mysterious to you, or you are new to organic gardening and want to learn more, this seminar will help you to enjoy your soil and live healthier without the use of pesticides and harmful chemical fertilizers. Economical and simple solutions are part of the organic methods we will discuss. Vegetables, flowers, lawns, shrubs and trees all do better with organic care. With a bit of patience, common sense *and a sense of humor*, your gardens and landscapes will be lush, beautiful and healthy while you help to improve the natural world around you. We will discuss most aspects of organic gardening to get you started in a healthier way in the garden.

Organic gardening starts with the soil.

Soil testing is important to know where to begin with your garden. The **PH** of the soil will identify the amount of acid in the soil. New England soil tends to be acidic which is fine for most shrubs, trees and some vegetables, but many of the flowers and vegetables we want to grow prefer a *sweeter soil* with a PH of around 6.5. Adding lime to acid soil will bring the PH into balance. Think of lime as Rolaids or Tums for the soil. Just as our digestive system requires balance, so does the soil.

Healthy soil contains 45% minerals, consisting of rocks, sand, silt and clay. It also contains 25% air between the particles of soil to allow roots to move freely, allow water to move through the soil and take in nutrients; 25% water to help the plants to digest the nutrients in the soil; and the remaining 5% of healthy soil is organic matter, we often call top soil.

Organic Matter is important for healthy soil to support healthy plants. Soil that has been previously treated by chemicals is often low in organic matter because synthetic fertilizers force-feed the plants, rather than building the soil. Healthy soil contains 5% organic matter containing healthy biodiversity of living organisms that continue to build the soil and feed the plants. Earthworms, microorganisms and healthy bacteria should be plentiful in your soil. When the soil lacks this biodiversity, we add compost or compost tea to get things started. If your soil is low in this material, it is best to top dress your soil with only one quarter inch in a season. Too much compost or organic matter added at once can cause other problems.

Compost is the fragrant, spongy, nutrient-rich material resulting from decomposition of organic matter. A healthy compost pile is made of layers of green material (such as weeds and kitchen scraps), and brown material (such as coffee grounds and filters, dead leaves, soil) alternated. I like to turn mine each week to mix in air and moisture to help it to break down more quickly. Other people leave the pile alone, but keep adding to it without turning very often. Compost can be purchased at garden centers and farms, as well, or check the “CT NOFA Farm and Food Guide” for sources.

A **soil test** will tell you what is missing in your soil and how to amend it. You can do your own soil testing, or send it to a testing lab. I often do it both ways and compare my results. When sending your soil sample to the Extension office (free), or other testing laboratory (fee), be sure to request organic methods for materials. The “normal” process often defers to chemical solutions.

Most **bugs** are beneficial in one way or another. The best way to prevent the problem bugs in your garden is to pay attention to your plants on a regular basis. Get to know the plants and their needs. As your soil becomes healthier, so will the plants. Try to plant “companions” to protect each other and learn about natural barriers and deterrents, that are covered in another seminar. In vegetable gardens, flowers like Nasturtiums are planted with cucumbers, squash and potatoes to keep away beetles and boars; Marigolds help to protect tomatoes and peppers. Asparagus planted with tomatoes or coreopsis will also confuse the bugs and be a springtime treat!

Each garden has its own needs and specific problems. No two gardens are the same, just as no two gardeners are exactly alike. For this reason, I have provided a bibliography for further resources.

The important thing about organic gardening is to **relax** and **enjoy** the natural world around you! Be patient with the soil and the plants, because it takes time, patience and a sense of humor to be a good gardener. Once you find the rhythm of organic gardening, you will find there is less work, less stress and a healthier lifestyle!

Happy Gardening!

**Bibliography for
Basic Organic Gardening
By Bettylou Sandy**

- | | |
|--|---|
| Start with the Soil
By Grace Gershuny
Rodale Press | Rodale's Chemical-Free
Yard and Garden
Rodale Press |
| Soil and Composting
By Nancy J. Ondra
Houghton Mifflin | Food Not Lawns
H.C.Flores
Chelsea Green Publishing |
| Basic Composting
Eric Ebeling
Stockpole Books | The Tool Book
By William Bryant Logan
Workman Publishing |
| Weedless Gardening
By Lee Reich
Workman Publishing | The Able Gardener
Kathleen Yeoman, R.N.
Garden Way Publishing |
| Foolproof Planting
By Ann Moyer Halpin and editors of
Rodale Press
Rodale Press | Carrots Love Tomatoes
By Louise Riotte
Garden Way Publishing |
| Square Foot Gardening
By Mel Bartholomew
Rodale Press | Great Garden Companions
Sally Jean Cunningham
Rodale Press |

CT NOFA
The Connecticut Chapter of
the Northeast Organic Farming Association
ctnofa.org