

The Principles of Organic Gardening

The Natural Way to Grow





Garden Organic (formerly known as the Henry Doubleday Research Association) is the UK's leading organic growing charity. We have been at the forefront of the organic horticulture movement since 1958, with over 20,000 members across the UK and overseas.

Dedicated to promoting organic gardening in homes, communities and schools, the charity encourages people to grow in the most sustainable way, and demonstrates the lasting benefits of organic growing to the health and wellbeing of individuals and the environment. For more information please visit www.gardenorganic.org.uk.

To create **The Principles of Organic Gardening**, we have adapted some of the organic farming standards and made them suitable for the domestic grower. The organic rules for farmers are held by other organic bodies, such as the Soil Association or IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements), and they are an integral part of the farmer's certification as organic. These guidelines are for gardeners, however, and they are a voluntary code of practice. Following them does not permit the sale of produce to be labelled as organic.



This booklet can also be used as a guide towards the self-declaration as an organic gardener.

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The Natural Way to Grow

The essence of organic growing is to work within natural systems and cycles. The basic principle is that the soil is as important as the plants it supports.

If you are interested in growing organically, we hope this booklet will help and inspire you. You may have a garden, or an allotment; perhaps you are creative with pots and containers on a balcony? This guide is for the novice as well as the experienced grower, young and old, urban and country dwellers.

You are part of a growing movement across the UK – one that supports healthy soils, encourages wildlife, and gives the satisfaction of harvesting fruit and vegetables free from toxic chemicals.

Why Organic is Important

There is no doubt that growing and gardening does you good. The fresh air and exercise helps your health and the pleasure of witnessing nature and the joy of your growing successes all help to increase your well-being. And if you grow **organically** there are extra benefits. Your efforts support the natural environment by respecting and connecting with nature; you will enjoy fruit and vegetables that contribute to a healthy diet, and you are naturally adopting a more sustainable lifestyle.



So What is Organic?

Organic growing doesn't just mean avoiding the use of chemical weed killers and pesticide sprays. It is more exciting, challenging and satisfying.

It is using natural ways to promote a complete, healthy, productive and sustainable growing environment. It involves feeding the soil, encouraging wildlife, and working creatively alongside nature when managing pests and diseases.

There are a number of principles behind organic growing, but these five are the most important for gardeners. They arise from years of practice and scientific study.

1. **BUILD AND MAINTAIN SOIL HEALTH.**

The soil is full of life, which supports healthy plant growth. It also has good structure, for plant roots to penetrate and take up nutrients.

2. **ENCOURAGE BIODIVERSITY.**

Different life forms such as plants, insects, birds and mammals all have a role in creating a resilient growing system. This variety of different species, all working together, encourages a healthy interdependency between plants and wildlife.

3. **USE RESOURCES RESPONSIBLY.**

The organic grower uses resources sustainably, with minimum damage to the planet.

4. **AVOID USING HARMFUL CHEMICALS.**

Toxic chemicals used to kill weeds, diseases and pests can damage the health of your growing area, and all the life-forms within and beyond it.

5. **A HEALTHY GROWING AREA.**

Keeping your growing area in good health, rather than just pest and disease free, is at the heart of organic growing. A diverse and vigorous growing system, good hygiene, and close observation all help prevent problems.



How This Guide Works

These guidelines describe the organic approach to gardening – what to do and what to avoid. However, this is *not* a growing advice booklet. For practical application of the organic principles, visit the Garden Organic website, gardenorganic.org.uk, where you will find links to numerous growing advice pages.

Many of us are on a growing journey, learning as the seasons pass, and hoping to move towards being as organic as possible. The signposts on the route all point to learning to embrace and trust the five principles. This booklet is written to help you. We have used a traffic light system, so that each technique is given the green, amber or red light.



Best practice. This should be your first choice, as an organic grower.

These techniques embody the organic principles. They are based on years of research and proven best practice. You will be working alongside nature and enhancing the natural environment.



Also acceptable.

Although not 'gold standard', this is still good practice, and you are thinking the organic way.



Acceptable, but not for regular use.

Sometimes the organic ideal simply isn't possible. In these sections, we offer the next best alternative. Many of these techniques are acceptable as a one-off or temporary measure, particularly in pest and disease management.



Not acceptable in organic growing.

These are things which should be avoided. They can either be bad practice, or even worse, cause harm to the natural environment.