



# Organic Gardening Beginners Guide to Growing Your Own Organic Vegetables

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

For many years home gardening has taken a back seat to other hobbies and outdoor past times. The most recent generations have considered gardening at home to be old fashioned and a waste of time, after all, vegetables and produce can be purchased at any local grocery store. However, as the economy has changed younger people have become interested in rural lifestyle and healthier diets. With this interest more attention has been given to home gardening and organic gardening.

Grocery stores have started carrying organic vegetables to meet with demands and health concerns but many shoppers have noticed that organic vegetables are often far more expensive than the non-organic counterpart. This discourages shoppers on a tight budget from buying and eating organically. There is an alternative to spending large amounts of money on organic vegetables. Now individuals can grow their own organic vegetables instead of buying them regardless of their individual living situation or available gardening space. Many great organic vegetables can be grown on a small balcony so you do not need a house and a garden to start growing your own organic vegetables.

This e-book has been created specifically for those who have become interested in growing organic vegetables in their home but do not know where or how to begin. This e-book is perfect for beginners who have never even thought about gardening before. It will walk you through the process of setting up your own garden easily and affordably. Now you will be able to start our own organic vegetable garden faster than you expected with a detailed, easy to understand, guide that has been created to help you get started.

If you are a bit apprehensive about starting your very own organic vegetable garden or apprehensive about gardening in general don't be! Starting a home garden is much easier than many people realize even if you have never set foot on a farm before or seen a home or backyard garden before. Organic gardening is just as easy since it is only a more natural approach to the gardening that many people and farmers do today. You can start your garden out small to get comfortable with growing organic vegetables and then add to it as time goes on. Once you get your organic vegetable garden started with the help of this e-book you will be amazed at how easy it is and will wonder why you didn't start your own garden years ago.

With the help of this e-book you will be able to grow healthy vegetables for yourself, friends, and family members. You will learn how to harvest the vegetables you grow organically and how to store them once they have been harvested. By starting an organic garden you will be giving yourself an excuse to spend a few minutes outdoors everyday monitoring your growing garden and enjoying the weather.

Organic gardening can even become a family pastime. People of all ages can enjoy and benefit from growing organic vegetables.

## Chapter 2 – Why Grow Organically?

Some first time gardeners might wonder why they should bother growing their vegetables organically. They wonder if it even makes any difference in the long run. Before that question can be answered a person must first understand what organic gardening really is.

Organic gardening is gardening without using any chemically created fertilizers, weed killers, or pesticides. In most gardens store bought fertilizers that are crammed with chemicals are used to treat the soil the vegetables are planted in. Later, more store bought pesticides and weed killers are sprayed among the vegetables while they are growing to kill the insects and weeds that are part of any garden.

For many using store bought fertilizers, weed killers, and pesticides seems like the best choice. It is often considered easier to run to the market, purchase a bottle of “weed killer” and spray your garden whenever you notice weeds growing. The process is later repeated when any pests appear or the vegetables do not seem to be growing well. The problem with using these store bought, chemically enhanced items is that you rarely know exactly what you are exposing your vegetables to.

There are some people who do take the time to check the ingredients on their products before buying them but most of us don't. In fact, many of us only look for the cheapest products available. After buying based on price we are then exposing ourselves to potentially harmful chemicals by using them on food we plan to later eat. Yes most vegetables are washed before being eaten but how thoroughly and how will washing help when the food has been grown using fertilizer loaded with unknown chemicals. The following are two common pesticides used for gardening with their known possible side effects:

**Malathion-** Abdominal pain, stomach cramps, anxiety, unsteadiness, confusion, depression, diarrhea, labored breathing, dizziness, sweating, loss of bowel or bladder control, eyelid, face, and neck twitching, unusual weakness, and slow heartbeat.

**Skoot-** Headache, dizziness, loss of memory, kidney pain, insomnia, nausea, and vomiting.

These are only two pesticides that can lead to serious health products. There are many more insecticides and pesticides used on vegetables that have very harmful side effects. In addition to chemically saturated pesticides most vegetables are also grown using fertilizers that are filled with chemicals and the vegetable plants are also treated with weed killers that expose vegetables to even more chemicals.

By growing organically you are placing yourself in complete control of what is going into the food that you are eating and completely avoiding any chance of being poisoned by pesticides. When vegetables are grown organically you do not have to wonder about what sort of

chemicals your vegetables have been exposed to since you know that you have used no store bought, man made, chemicals in your garden.

In the event that you do feel that your vegetable garden needs pesticide or fertilizer there are natural ways to create both fertilizer and pesticide that do not involve buying outside products.

Along with shunning the use of pesticides organic vegetable gardening is also a great way to save money and valuable resources. Surprisingly, many gardeners and those that are interested in starting their own gardens do not realize that starting an organic garden is a money saving move. It is easy to forget that if you are not using store bought chemicals you do not have to pay additionally money each month for chemicals that you will quickly use and have to replace.

If you do not believe that organic gardening will save you money price the cost of store bought fertilizers, pesticides, and even weed killers the next time you are at the store. Once you have found the cheapest items imagine having to continuously buy them to keep your garden going in addition to your normal household groceries and supplies.

Imagine the money you will you will save by not using these expensive products all together. Also imagine the money you will save by not having to waste gas making last minute trips to the market when you realize you have run out of these supplies.

These last minute trips to the grocery store will happen more often than you realize if you start a garden using chemicals. It is easy to forget to purchase weed killer during a hectic grocery store trip only to come home and find that weeds are overrunning your garden. The same thing often happens with pesticides. Many gardeners will not purchase a replacement bottle of pesticide because they have not noticed any insects. Then, the next thing they know, their garden is overrun with hungry insects ruining the fruits of their labor.

If saving money isn't a major concern for you or your family think about the health benefits that come from gardening organically. Organic vegetables are usually recommended with many diets, especially diets that encourage detoxification and the cleansing of ones system. Having a fresh supply of organic vegetables on hand at all times will help you and your family lead a healthier lifestyle and make any organic vegetable detox diet easier to maintain.

Organic vegetables and a detox regiment can do wonders for your health and the health of your family. Many people who eat meals that are made up of at least 60% organic vegetables will find that they have more energy as a result of receiving more vitamins and minerals from a natural source. Overtime those who have diet consisting primarily of organic vegetables will experience a lowering of blood pressure and cholesterol. They will also find it easier to lose weight since they are consuming less fat and processed foods.

Last, but never least, organic vegetables taste much better than those that have been heavily treated with chemicals. Good, organic, vegetables that have never been sprayed with pesticides and other chemicals will usually have a more pronounced flavor and better taste than their non-organic counterpart. People who eat organic vegetables taste the vegetable

and not the chemicals that have been used to protect and grow the vegetable. Many people who grow organic vegetables do so for the great taste more than anything else.

## Chapter 3 – Organic Gardening Supplies

Now that you know why you should grow your vegetables organically you are now probably wondering how to do that. Getting your organic garden started is easier than you think especially since you do not have to worry about stocking up on expensive, potentially dangerous, chemical fertilizers and other items. Most of the things you will need to start your organic garden are already in your house or easy to get.

Be sure you plan things carefully and do not just get some seeds or plants and start digging up your yard. That piece of advice will probably be repeated in this e-book because that is usually the mistake most beginner gardeners make. In order to have a successful organic garden you need to take your time and plan everything out careful.

### 1. Space

Before you can start growing your organic vegetables you will need a place to plant them. This choice is going to be based largely on your living situation. If you are in a townhouse or apartment or even a house without a suitable yard then you will want to consider using pots. It is possible to grow many small vegetables in pots or containers that come in a wide variety of sizes.

If you do not already have pots or containers that are suitable for growing plants you can order them online for surprisingly low prices or pick them up from your nursery. Make sure you look around your house before you spend your money. You might be surprised to find that you have several suitable items or old plant pots that you have forgotten about.

If you are someone with a home that has a large yard then you have more options. You can start your organic garden in any location that you feel will be suitable for growing plants. One thing to remember when picking out an area of your yard for growing organic vegetables is to choose a location that will get a good amount of sunlight during the entire day.

Finding out the best spot based on lighting will require a few days of careful observation but it will be worth it if you can find a good spot in which to start your organic vegetable garden.

The size of your organic vegetable garden is entirely up to you and based on the amount of available space that you have at your disposal. Do not be afraid to start a small garden and build up to a large one and do not be discouraged if you feel you do not have as much space as you would like for your new garden. You are just starting out and working with the resources that are currently available.

## **2. Soil**

Good soil is the second thing that you need to get your organic vegetable garden going and this is probably the most important part of your new garden. The soil you choose must be rich and fertile if you want your vegetables to grow healthy and strong. If the soil in your garden seems thin or unsuitable do not give up hope yet. There are ways to make the available soil more fertile and perfect for gardening that will be explained in a minute.

Remember, you must NOT use any chemical fertilizer in your new organic vegetable garden!

Most new organic vegetable growers are first tempted to use chemicals when they are inspecting the quality of their available soil. It is tempting to go purchase a bag of soil that is packed with chemical fertilizers if your own soil does not seem rich enough. This is a big step in the wrong direction and must be avoided at all costs. There are ways to make your soil rich and suitable for growing that does not involve using expensive, and sometimes hazard, outside chemicals.

If you are growing your plants in pots or organic containers on a back patio or window sill getting soil might take a bit more effort. Soil can be obtained from willing neighbors or family members that have their own yards. Simply ask for some soil and shovel it into your waiting container.

When that is not an option consider purchasing organic soil from a garden supply shop. There are places that sell soil with no chemical fertilizers. This might be an additional start cost not incurred by those with their own back yards but it will be worth it.

By having your own purchased organic soil you will be able to fill your pots and containers then plant your seeds when it suits you. Another benefit of using pots and containers is that your soil temperature will not be at the mercy of the ground temperature.

## **3. Compost**

Compost is something that you will need to help your garden thrive especially if your soil is not as fertile as you would have hoped. Rich compost will give your soil the minerals necessary to help your vegetables grow and thrive during the growing seasons. It is easy to make compost using materials that you have on hand especially if you have your own backyard or access to an outdoor area.

In order to create your own organic compost you will need to first dig a pit or two (depending on the size of your garden) in your back yard.

Once your pit has been dug fill it with the following refuse from your kitchen:

**Vegetable Peels**

**Fruit Peels**

**Leaves**

**Bark**

**Needles**

**Egg Shells**

**Coffee Grinds**

**Corn Stalks**

Anything fruits, vegetables, and items mentioned that you use should go into your compost pit instead of the trash for awhile. Any leaves you can find can also be put into the compost pit. If you have neighbors you can ask for their refuse as well to help fill your pits faster. This is especially recommended if you are a single person or part of a couple that does not accumulate trash very quickly. Many neighbors will be willing to share their refuse if they are promised a bit of the fresh harvest when it comes available.

This compost pit **MUST** be started well before you plan to plant. It is recommended that you start your compost pit at least three weeks before you intend to start planting seeds if not sooner. The longer your compost has to age the better so do not delay when it comes to starting your pit.

In fact, you might want to consider digging your compost pit as soon as the ground becomes soft enough to work right after winter. This way your compost will be ready when the time comes for you to start digging your garden or preparing your containers.

If you are someone that is growing organic vegetables in a limited space using pots and containers you might want to purchase organic compost from a gardening supply store. This will be easier than attempting to create your own compost in a small space. Purchasing your own aged compost will be easier and much more convenient when working with a limited amount of space.

#### **4. Organic Mulch & Newspaper**

Old newspapers and organic mulch are a must have for anyone starting a new organic vegetable garden. Organic mulch can be made up of a variety of items that are probably on or around your property. Fallen leaves, flower blossoms, twigs, fallen needles from trees, and even bark can all be used as mulch. When you see any of these things around your property do not be afraid to gather it in bags and take it to the site of your future vegetable garden to use as mulch.

Many gardeners do not think mulch is important for anything other than visual appeal. While mulch will help make your planted garden look more tidy organic mulch has many other benefits that make it a vital part of your vegetable garden. For starters organic mulch will help cut down on the growth of weeds that could ruin your new garden.

Organic mulch will also help improve the quality of soil in your vegetable garden. Unlike non-organic mulches, organic mulch will decay and decompose overtime becoming a layer of rich and fertile topsoil. This will add nutrients to the vegetables in addition to its other uses.

Before the organic mulch decays it will help keep the water used to water your new vegetable garden from evaporating before it has a chance to do its work. It will also help keep the temperature of your soil even by warming the soil during the winter and cooling it during the summer. This is a great feature to those who grow vegetables all year round. The old newspaper helps perform another function that will help your vegetable garden thrive.

When you are ready to start laying down your mulch to protect your newly planted vegetable garden you should have a good supply of old newspapers available. These newspapers should be placed on the ground before you lay down your mulch. The newspaper will help protect your organic vegetable garden from the insects that will be attracted to your mulch.

There are a few things to remember when choosing your mulch and laying it down over and around your garden. For starters avoid using hay for organic vegetable garden mulch. Even though hay can be found easily and purchased cheaply in many areas it is often filled with weed seed. You will be helping to cause the problem you are trying to avoid.

Also, make sure you do not lay the mulch down too thickly. Mulch should be no more than two to three inches thick and once it is laid down you should still watch the mulch carefully. Make sure the mulch is not matting together since that can prevent water from reaching your vegetable seeds. Another thing to watch out for is slimy mulch which can occur when some of the materials used to create a layer of mulch become slimy as they decay. If this happens simply shovel the slimy mulch away and replace it with a fresh layer of organic mulch.

#### **5. Gloves, Shovels, and Hoes**

A few old fashioned garden tools are the only other things you will need to get your garden started (other than seed of course) and if you do not already have them they can be purchased anywhere that sells garden supplies. You will need a good shovel to dig your compost pits and

your garden area. A good garden hoe will also be necessary for any weeding that needs to be done and a good strong pair of gloves.

Gloves will be needed to protect your hands when shoveling and doing garden work that is more hands on. Weeding in particular will require a good pair of gloves since it will often be easier to simply pull up weeds by hand instead of using a hoe to kill them.

## **Chapter 4 – Deciding What to Grow**

Once you have gotten everything together that you will need to create and maintain your organic vegetable garden you now need something to plant in it. For many choosing what vegetables to grow is the fun part since you get to imagine what sort of vegetables you will see shooting up from your new garden. There are many organic vegetable seeds available for sale from retailers both online and offline. In fact, there are so many seeds to choose from that some people find themselves completely overwhelmed by their options.

If you are someone that has never grown vegetables before then it is important that you stick to vegetables that are easy to grow. Even though they might be vegetables that you have not usually eaten before or never thought about growing you might be surprised by the results. Quite a few organic gardeners have found that vegetables they usually hated when purchased canned or frozen tasted delicious when harvested from their own backyard. The following are a few vegetables that are easy to go organically and often a delicious treat.

### **Tomatoes**

Tomatoes are a popular vegetable to grow at home because they can grow well in all climates. There are many different varieties of tomatoes available many of which do not require any stakes or fences to grow against. Cherry tomatoes are especially popular because they are usually expensive in stores but are great in salads and served as appetizers in many recipes.

When growing organic tomatoes it is important that they get enough water and sunlight. In order to get the best results and the largest harvest possible you must be sure to pick your tomatoes as soon as they ripen.

### **Chilies & Peppers**

Peppers are a great organic vegetable to grow if you are working with a small amount of space or growing vegetables in pots or containers. They will grow well and will grow almost all year round if the conditions are right. Peppers do not have to be harvested as soon as they appear ripe. This means that you can wait and pick your peppers as you need them.

When you do want to harvest all your peppers storage is very easy. They can be dried by placing them in a dark, dry, place with lots of air (an attic) for a few weeks. If you do not have a good place to dry peppers and chilies, they will often keep if stored in a tight glass jar.

## **Zucchini**

Zucchini and most squash/pumpkins are great for first time organic gardeners. They are easy to plant and grow very quickly which means you do not have to wait a long time to actually start seeing results. Many people feel as if their zucchinis grow literally overnight.

When growing Zucchini and other squash it is important that you or your family members pick them right away. This will help encourage new plants to grow and will leave you with a large harvest. However, if you are growing pumpkins then you must wait to harvest them until all of the vines have died.

## **Peas**

Peas are a favorite vegetable for many children so growing organic peas is a great idea if you are growing food for a family. Peas are another vegetable that will grow in extremely large amounts and will grow from spring, through summer, and even into winter. In some climates peas will grow nearly all year round making them a great source of fresh, organic, food.

When growing peas it is important that the plants have support usually in the form of a stake or support that can be found at a plant supply store or nursery. Peas must be watered often and watched constantly for weeds. Too many weeds will quickly ruin your crop of peas so weed them often and carefully.

## **Turnips**

Turnips are another vegetable that grow quickly and easily. Both the root and the leaves can be eaten and turnips are great raw, roasted, boiled, or mashed. When growing turnips the only thing you have to remember is to water them often since turnips need a lot of water to grow.

## **Corn**

If you have the space for it corn is a great vegetable to plant. Roasted or grilled corn is great addition to any meal and watching a corn crop ripen is a wonderful sight. Plus the corn stalks can later be used as compost!

When growing corn you have got to be sure the seeds are planted at least 15 inches apart. Make sure the seeds are well fertilized with compost when they are first planted and again in another two weeks. You will be able to start enjoying your fresh organic corn after the first silks appear.

## **Beets**

Beets will grow beautifully in a well fertilized area and fresh organic beets will always be much better than anything you will find in a can or even in the grocery store. When growing beets always make sure there is enough mulch down to keep the soil warm in the cool months and cool in the summer. Make sure you harvest all of your beets before the first frost comes.

## **Potatoes**

Seed potatoes are easy to plant and even easier to grow. Weed and hoe often for best results and it is best to plant them in larger organic gardens. Planting potatoes with your other crops will often help discourage some insects and children love digging potatoes in the fall.

## **Carrots**

Plant your carrot seeds in early spring and once you have harvested the first crop you can always plant more. As long as the soil is loose and deep enough you can get carrots to grow. Fresh organic carrots are a great addition to any garden.

## **Green Beans**

Planting green beans can help save you money if you are a parent or person that buys canned green beans often. Green beans can be planted as soon as the cold weather breaks and there is no chance of the ground freezing or the plants frosting. You can purchase seeds that will grow in a bush or those that will grow against a pole or stake. For smaller gardens it is usually easier to plant pole green beans.

## **Lettuce**

Lettuce is an easy must have if you are a salad eater. There are many varieties available and lettuce should be planted before the weather gets too warm. The hot summer weather will cause your lettuce to wilt quickly but during the cool spring your lettuce will thrive.

## **Radish**

Radishes are another great vegetable for salad eaters and one of the first vegetables a new organic gardener should try. They are easy to plant and can be grown all through summer and into the fall.

## **Spring Onions**

Spring onions are easy to plant since they only need a lot of water to grow. They are a great garnish to any dish AND planting onions around your garden border will help discourage pests.

## Chapter 5 – Planting Your Vegetable Garden

Once you have all of your supplies and have decided what to grow it is time to actually plant your garden. Before you grab a shovel and charge into your yard to start digging you might want to take some time to plan out how you want to set up your garden. You should have a good idea of what you want to plant and exactly where you want to plant it before you start digging up random holes in your garden.

The best way to organize your garden is to get a piece of paper and sketch a plan for your garden. Decide where you want your garden to be and make sure it is an area that will receive sun for the majority of the day. Start observing your yard a few weeks before you start planting, about the same time you start your compost pits. Make notes regarding which areas of your yard receive sunlight during the majority of the day and which areas of your yard are often in the shade.

There are other factors that you should take into consideration when choosing where to plant your garden. Avoid areas that have recently undergone repairs or that are near metal fences. Chemicals, metal, and other debris might be contaminating the area which could lead to your plants being contaminated. Also be on the look out for areas that retain water after rain. The last thing you want to do is plant your garden in a place that will become a stagnant pool of water after every rain or when you water it. When you have picked out a suitable area make sure you stop using any chemicals on or around it immediately.

When deciding how to plant your seeds try to plan for efficiency not visual appeal. If you are planting beans or peas and corns plant the peas in a row in front of the corn. That way you can use the corn stalks as stakes instead of buying stakes to support your plants on. Also, to help cut down on pests, consider growing onions, garlic, and herbs like basil in a border around your vegetables. These pungent vegetables will discourage certain insects from feasting on your vegetables.

Once you have decided where you are going to plant your garden go to your yard and remove all rocks or plants that are already growing in the area. Once all large rocks are gone from the surface also remove plants and then dig up the soil a few inches to loosen it. Dig/loosen an area that is about eight inches thick since this will provide you with a good working area. Make sure the area you start out with is not too big. You want to start out modestly and then build up once you are comfortable with organic gardening and know what vegetables you want to plant more of.

When all debris has been removed from the chosen area and the soil has been loosened cover your garden site with a good layer of organic mulch. This can be the leaves from plants that were removed from the area, dried grass from your lawn, needles then place from trees, barks, and other organic material. Make sure you do not use weeds or any material, such as hay, that could contain weed seeds. If you are using materials that came from a neighbor's property or another location make sure it has never been treated with chemicals or pesticides.

Next, spread the compost from your compost pits thinly over the garden. By doing this you are creating a place rich in nutrients for your vegetables to grow. Mix soil from your back yard or even soil that is underneath any nearby trees with this layer of compost until you have a several inches of soil and compost that are deep enough for planting.

Make sure the soil remains damp but not too soggy when you get ready to plant your seeds and also avoid stepping on it or otherwise compact the soil. Then, when you are ready, start planting your seeds in the order you previously planned. Pay attention to the seed instructions regarding how far apart to sow seeds and make sure you place the seeds just underneath the soil.

If this is your first time planting or are you afraid that you will plant the seeds too close together create furrows by moving aside a layer of soil and then consider making your own seed tape. If you have some toilet paper and a spray bottle that can be used to spray water then you are all set. Just roll the toilet paper out on a table, mist the toilet paper with the sprayer, and place the seeds out according to the seed packets directions.

Cover the seeds with another long strip of toilet paper, fold the edges and mist it again to make sure the seeds stay in place. Then carry the seed tape out to your garden and place them in the furrows you've already created and cover them with soil. Doing this will help you avoid spending time outdoors trying to figure out the correct distance between seeds and then later worrying about the possibility of planting the seeds too close together.

Another method for planting seeds is purchasing seeds that have already been started. This means the seeds have already begun to sprout. Seeds that have already begun to sprout can usually be purchased in any garden store and many organic seeds come in biodegradable containers. Once you get the seeds home all you have to do is plant the containers in your garden area then place old newspaper around the sprouts and cover the newspaper with mulch.

To save money you can also start seeds at home using your own containers and compost from your compost pile. By starting seeds you will be letting them sprout, usually indoors with the help of a grow light, and then transplanting them to a garden. It is best to start organic seeds in biodegradable containers since this will help you avoid damage that sometimes occurs during a transplant. Once the seeds have sprouted you simply plant the containers in your garden and surround them with newspaper and mulch.

If you are growing the seeds directly in the ground using seed tape or planting by hand laying down the mulch and newspaper can be a pain. In fact it will probably be the most difficult part of your new garden since you want to make sure you do not cover your seeds. Marking your seeds when planting them is usually the best way to avoid trouble or waiting to lay mulch until the seeds have begun to sprout.

It is recommended that you mark the seed areas and lay mulch immediately because even though it is an added step it will be well worth it since the newspaper and mulch will help the soil retain its water and discourage weed growth and insect infestations.

## Chapter 6 – Making Your Garden Thrive

After the seeds have been sown many people are tempted to relax and simply wait for their garden to bloom. These people believe that after the seeds have been planted all of the hard work has been finished and there is nothing left to do. As tempting as it might be to relax and watch the fruits of your labor you must remember that there is still work to do if you want your organic vegetable garden to grow and thrive.

The first thing you must remember to do is water your garden everyday. If you have a family this can be a shared family chore assigned to children or spouses can take turns. During the spring and early summer many people will use watering the garden as an excuse to go outside and enjoy the warm weather. On rainy days you do not need to worry about watering your garden but make sure you do not let the break in routine lead you to forgetting to water your garden the next day, once the rain has stopped.

Watering the garden should be done early in the morning. Before 10:00am if at all possible. If you wait until the afternoon the high noon sun will often cause the water to evaporate before it can properly water your young plants. When you are watering your plants check the mulch to make sure it is not becoming too matted. This can lead to the water not reaching the seeds. Matted mulch can bunch together tightly and absorb the water that you are pouring onto your plants.

One thing you must avoid is over watering your garden! This has happened to many unsuspecting gardeners especially if the garden is in a home with several would be gardeners. It is easy for two or more members of a household to all water the garden in the same day. To avoid this communicate and make sure no one has watered the garden before you go out to water it. Also, when you are out looking at the garden check to see if the ground is very wet or soggy which could be an indication of a recent watering.

Too much watering eventually drowns plants and be just as harmful as not enough watering. Keep track of how much water your garden is getting and after a large rainstorm you might consider waiting a day or two before watering the vegetables again. After a large rainstorm go outside and check the garden to see if the soil is very wet and do not water the vegetable garden if it is still extremely saturated.

Watering consistently is your ultimate goal. If you are sharing the watering duties with other people create a schedule to regulate the time gardens are being watered and if possible regulate the amount of water being used. Watering your plants consistently at the same time with the same amount of water each day will do wonders.

Weeding is another important part of having an organic vegetable garden that many first time gardeners overlook. Weeds will quickly overrun a vegetable garden killing the vegetables and leaving you with a garden filled with weeds. Check your garden each day for weeds and get rid of them as soon as you notice them.

Since you are growing an organic garden you cannot turn to tempting weed sprays and chemicals. Instead you should rely on old fashioned hoeing and weed pulling. If your garden is checked thoroughly everyday it is possible to pull weeds quickly and efficiently before they have a chance to get out of control. Weeding is another chore that is good to rotate especially with children. Growing up quite a few of our grandparents spent hours in the garden carefully weeding their family gardens by hand as punishment for some mischief or another.

Insects are another thing that must be watched for when growing an organic garden. Some insects and “pests” are useful for helping a garden grow but too many will eat your vegetables before your family even has a chance to bring in a small harvest. Mulch and newspaper will help to cut down on insects, slugs, and other things that are part of every garden but insects will often persist. Here are some of the insects that all organic gardeners should watch out for along with ways to get rid of them:

**Corn Earworm:** These insects can be avoided all together by working the soil during the spring and fall to expose the pupae. Exposing them will lead to them being destroyed by wind and rain or predators. If you notice caterpillars spray them with diluted soapy water and homemade insecticide.

**Cutworm:** An easy way to get rid of these pests is to spread wheat bran and molasses over garden beds a week before planting new plants. There are also nematodes that can be added to the soil to destroy the cutworm or you (or your children) can pick the caterpillars off each evening once the sun has gone down. Full night is often the best time to catch them and do this.

**Cabbage Worm:** If you notice these worms while the caterpillars are still small you can spray them with homemade insecticide or diluted soapy water. They can also be picked off by hand once they have grown. Another job for your children, or neighborhood children, that love playing with insects and caterpillars.

**Tomato Hornworm:** Spray the caterpillars with homemade pesticide while they are still young and tilling the soil during the fall will help destroy any remaining pupae. If there are only a few they can be easily picked off by hand.

**Slugs & Snails:** These two pests are the bane of most organic gardens. Many people invest in expensive raised plant beds in hopes of avoiding them all together but there are more cost effective ways to avoid both snails and slugs. The first way is to edge your garden area with copper tape. Growing clover will attract natural predators which will attack the snails and slugs while leaving your garden alone. Lastly, you can place shallow pans of beer in and around your garden to trap them. Dispose of all slugs and snails trapped that way daily.

**Aphid:** These insects can usually be repelled with some diluted soapy water or even plain water. If your plants are heavily infested in certain areas prune off these leaves and dispose of them quickly.

**Flea Beetle:** Beneficial nematodes can be added to the soil to help eliminate these insects and similar insects. Row covers can also be used to cover and protect the plants when possible. One great way to avoid these pests all together is to wait to plant your crops until later in spring after the largest population of flea beetles have moved on from your area (hopefully) or been attracted to existing gardens.

**Cucumber Beetle:** Nematodes will help destroy these beetles as well as flea beetles. Once they have matured or appeared in your garden they can be picked off or sprayed with homemade insecticide. Once you have brought in your harvest be sure to clean the garden area to avoid a fresh infestation during the next planting season.

**Squash Bug:** These bugs will often be hiding on the underside of your leaves so check your garden for them carefully. When you see them they can be picked off. If that does not keep their number down then you should spray the plants with homemade pesticide.

If your organic vegetable garden is being overrun there are some things that you can do to help get rid of the insects. One way to help get rid of insects is to create your own organic pesticide. This can be done by taking two teaspoons of dish liquid soap and mixing it with one cup of vegetable oil. Add a couple of teaspoons of this mixture to water in a spray bottle and spray the areas of your garden most heavily affected.

When spray isn't enough consider planting borders of naturally repelling plants around your vegetables if you haven't already. Insect repelling plants can even be planted in between the rows of vegetables if enough space exists and can be even more helpful than homemade insect spray. Onions and garlic are two vegetables that are perfect for repelling insects and certain herbs like basil can also help. These plants can often be purchased in small pots already half grown and transplanted to your garden to provide immediate protection.

There are other things that organic vegetable growers have to look out for in addition to insects. Many funguses and other plant disease can destroy a healthy vegetable garden before it has a chance to truly thrive. When watching for plant diseases be on the look out for unexplained wilting, molding, rotting, blotches, moldy coatings, whiting, rusting, and spots.

It is much easier to avoid these diseases instead of treating them and to avoid them it is important that you take good care of your vegetable garden. Rotate your crops each year and always keep the growing area clean in between growing seasons. When growing your crops always make sure they are well watered and fertilized since this will help keep them healthy. Try to find disease resistant seeds and plants along with disease free starter plants. The following is a list of the most common plant diseases that will help you diagnose and treat them effectively and organically:

**Bacterial Leaf Spot:** This is something that is common in some gardens and that many new organic gardeners will recognize immediately. The leaves infected with this disease will have small, black or brown water-soaked spots. The spots will eventually dry up; crack, and leave holes and the infected leaves will often drop off and die prematurely.

This disease is common with tomatoes, peppers, and members of the cabbage family. The symptoms will often appear during wet weather and can be controlled by immediately removing infected leaves. It can be hard to keep up with the disease during wet weather but it can be done.

**Late Blight:** This disease most often affects tomatoes and potato plants later in the growing season. The disease will start out as wet grayish or greenish spots on the leaves and will progress into a white fungal growth that will form on the undersides of the leaves. There are some varieties and tomatoes and potatoes that are resistant to the disease. When these varieties are available select them regardless of the expense since you will benefit from a larger harvest. If you are unable to find a resistant variety remove and dispose of any infected parts of a plant. One way to help avoid this disease is to water plants early in the morning so that they have a chance to dry out completely during the day which will discourage fungus growth.

**Common Rust:** Rust will affect many vegetables so it must be watched for carefully. The following vegetables are commonly affected by vegetables:

**Asparagus**

**Beans**

**Corn**

**Onions**

The primary symptom of common rust is a reddish brown spot that appears to be powdery. These spots will usually appear on the leaves of the vegetables affected and will rub off when touch. Hand picking infected leaves will help reduce the spread of infection. Plants that are seriously infected should be completely removed and destroyed.

There are ways to avoid common rust completely. One way is to make sure all plants have good air circulation so avoid planting your seeds too close together since this will lead to crowded conditions. Also weed your garden often and prune plants to make sure plants continue to be well circulated.

**Anthracnose:** Organic vegetable growers in the United States will have to deal with anthracnose more often than organic vegetable growers in other countries. This disease occurs in warm, wet climates and will affect the stems, leaves, and fruits of the plants. Cucumbers, tomatoes, melons, and beans are the vegetables that are most often affected by the disease.

It will begin as small spots on various parts of the affected vegetable. Later pink spores will start to appear in the center of the spots. Water with a bit of lime juice sprayed on the leaf buds will help reduce the chances of this disease starting or spreading. Any seriously infected plants must be completely removed and destroyed.

**Mosaic Virus:** This disease is highly viral and can infect an entire garden if one is not careful. There is currently no way to cure this virus but there are plants and seeds that can be purchased which are already resistant to the virus. The disease can be identified by a stunting in the growth of the infected plants and the leaves will begin to curl without reason. Infected plants must be destroyed and one way to help cut down on chances of the disease is to spray plants with homemade pesticide to kill or repel any insects that might be carrying the virus.

**Wilts:** This disease is another one that can affect your entire garden. It can be identified by wilting of lower leaves and is often accompanied by yellow blotches. To avoid the disease altogether organic vegetable growers should watch out for cucumber beetles which carry the disease and other insect. Vegetable growers should also try to plant vegetables which are resistant to the disease.

**Powdery Mildew:** This disease will appear on the leaves, stems, flowers, of the vegetables in your garden. It comes in the form of a powdery mildew that will coat the affected areas with a white or gray coating. Ways to avoid the mildew are pruning plants to help encourage air circulation and removing any fallen leaves from underneath the plants. Keeping organic mulch around your plants will also help and baking soda can be used to help treat the disease and prevent it spread. Adding baking soda to water and spraying the infected plants will help cure them and prevent more infections.

**Clubroot:** A disease that infects cabbage, cauliflower, and broccoli clubroot is a fungus that inhabits the soil. Plants that are infected with this disease will have swollen roots and will wilt in the full sun. A way to avoid clubroot is to purchase seeds that are resistant to the disease and to rotate vegetable crops each year.

Once you have conquered weeds, insects, and avoided water shortages along with diseases you must always be sure that your vegetables are receiving enough nutrients. This nutrient comes from the rich soil and compost that they are growing from. Do not be afraid to spread more compost around your growing plants to help encourage growth.

Some plants, corn especially, need compost every few weeks in order to grow properly. If you feel that your compost is not making enough of a difference consider purchasing organic manure from local nurseries and even small farms. Aged manure might sound disgusting but it can mean the difference between a healthy, thriving, garden and a struggling one.

## **Chapter 7 – My Garden Won't Grow. Trouble Shooting Your Organic Vegetables**

You have now planted your own organic vegetable garden and have done everything that you can to get it started. Unfortunately the seeds have not started sprouting or your started seeds have not grown much if it all. Before you throw in the towel and give up on organic gardening there are a few things that you should try.

First of all, have you been hand weeding your garden daily? This might sound like a pain and stupid chore but it could make all the difference in the world. Make a point of visiting your vegetable garden each day and carefully checking for weeds. Do not let the children do it and do not rely on a glance from your back window to tell you whether weeds are growing or not.

Many gardeners have done casual checks and later realized that the sprouts they thought were growing in their garden were really weeds. Make a close inspection each day and weed by hand to make sure the job is thoroughly done. Throw these weeds away do NOT put them into your compost pit. In order to get the best results dedicate 20 minutes each day to pulling weeds.

If you have been weeding your garden each day and your plants still seem to be growing slowly start adding rich, aged, compost to the slow growing vegetables. Many plants just need a helping hand and some vegetables, corn, pumpkins, and squash, all need compost to provide richness and nutrients. Spreading some aged compost from your composts pits will help your vegetables grow properly.

After adding compost to your vegetables every few days leads to no results consider investing in some manure from your local garden supplier. They will often have organic manure on hand for your gardening needs and this will act as a stronger fertilizer than your compost. If you are afraid to try manure you can invest in some aged compost purchased from a nursery first. In many cases your compost pits will only be a few weeks old when you are trying to use them to encourage growth some older compost might just do the trick.

Do not be afraid to increase the amount of water that you are giving your garden. You should be careful not to over water your plants but you want to make sure that your plants are getting enough water to survive and thrive. When you water your plants in the morning always check to see if the soil appears dry. If the soil seems dry one day after watering you might want to consider increasing the amount of water you are giving them. The soil should always be a little damp around your plants.

Lastly, do not be afraid to spray your homemade pesticide or even a bit of diluted soapy water on your plants to get ride of insects. If you notice a lot of pests are attracted to your vegetable garden consider spraying once every ten days or once every two weeks. Also, spray diluted soapy water directly onto vegetables that have insects on them all the time.

## **Chapter 8 – Harvesting Your Organic Vegetables**

Harvesting your organic vegetables is usually the best part of having an organic garden. The whole family will usually volunteer to help even if only one or two has actually helped during the growing season. The harvest time for your organic vegetables varies depending upon the plant with many vegetables ripening all season long.

It is important that you harvest your vegetables as soon as they are ready instead of letting them stay out in the sun. Many vegetables will rapidly deteriorate if left out after ripening losing flavor. They will also become too mushy and tender losing their appeal entirely.

There are some plants that can be left out after they have ripened or even harvested before they are fully ripe. The following are a list of typical harvest times for vegetables that are commonly grown in organic gardens. Make sure you check your gardens constantly around harvest time since some vegetables will ripen virtually overnight. Even after you have brought in a large crop keep checking your garden because some vegetables simply produce more vegetables after the first crop is removed.

### **Beets**

Harvest beets when they are between 1 ¼ and 2 inches in diameter and leaves are 4 to 6 inches long. Remember the beet tops can be eaten too!

### **Snap Beans**

Harvest snap beans when the pods are firm and snap easily and the seeds are still undeveloped.

### **Carrots**

Harvest carrots when they are crisp and between ½ to 1 inch in diameter. Younger carrots are tenderer but older carrots are often sweeter so you can leave them until the first frost. If you like younger carrots pick them as soon as they are big enough and plant more for a fresh crop.

### **Corn**

Harvest corn when the silk begins to turn dark and shrivels. This is usually about 20 days after the first silk strands appear but sometimes sooner so keep your eyes peeled.

## **Cucumbers**

Harvest cucumbers when they are between 2 and 8 inches long depending on your personal preferences. They are best for eating when they are dark green, firm, and crisp. Once the cucumbers are removed more will develop in their place so keep an eye on them.

## **Eggplant**

Harvest eggplant when they are between 6 to 8 inches long and glossy with a deep color. Use either pruning shears or a knife to cut the fruit from the plant.

## **Garlic**

Harvest garlic when the tops of the bulbs begin turn yellow and dry out. The bulbs must be put on screens to dry and once they have dried trim the roots close to the bulbs and remove the loose outer sheaths before storing.

## **Spring Onions**

Harvest spring onions and leeks in the fall by loosening the soil, pulling up the roots, and cutting off the roots.

## **Lettuce**

Harvest lettuce 50 to 60 days after planting. They can often be harvested before when they are small but they will reach their maximum size in 60 days.

## **Okra**

Harvest okra pods when they are immature and tender. Do not let the pods become more than 3 inches long. After you pick the pods more will grow and must be harvested every day.

## **Onions**

Harvest onions after the tops have fallen down. After digging them up let the onions air dry for two days before storing.

## **Peas**

Harvest peas when the pod is green and full but still tender. Pods are usually ready to be harvested a week after the plant flowers.

## **Peppers**

Harvest peppers when they are mature they can be picked at any size or allowed to ripen more to produce a stronger taste.

## **Potatoes**

Harvest large potatoes once the vine has died using a spading fork. The potatoes are usually four to six inches below the soil and must be handled gently to avoid bruising and spoiling.

## **Pumpkins**

Harvest pumpkins only after they have fully ripened on vines and pick them before the first heavy freeze. The rind should be hard and have a solid color.

## **Radishes**

Harvest radishes from the time that they are the size of large marbles and do not let them get larger than 1 inch in diameter.

## **Squash**

Harvest squash when the plant is between 6 and 8 inches in diameter. They are usually ready to pick 4 to 8 weeks after the plant flowers.

## **Turnips**

Harvest turnips when the roots are between 2 and 3 inches in diameter and the tops are between 4 to 6 inches long. The tops can be eaten too.

Instructions on harvesting vegetables might seem silly but if you do not harvest your vegetables during the correct time frame you will be unable to use them later. Do not let all of your hard work go to waste. Pay careful attention to when you plant your vegetables and check them often close to harvest time.

Vegetables that require thinning or constant harvesting make sure you or a family member harvest the vegetables once a day or once every other day. If you do not harvest the vegetables often the plants will soon become inactive. To avoid getting over worked try to only plant vegetables like peas and squash that will continue to ripen after the first crop is picked if you will be constantly using and eating these vegetables.

If you are unable to harvest large quantities of vegetables or do not think you will be able to keep track of the appropriate harvest seasons grow only vegetables like peppers that are lenient when it comes to harvesting them on time. For those who are in cold areas where frosts happen unrepentantly consider growing vegetables like turnips that can remain in the ground safely even after a hard frost and dug up well into winter.

## **Chapter 9 – Storing Your Organic Vegetables**

After you have harvested your vegetables you might not be sure what you should do with them. Even a large family will have a hard time eating a steady supply of fresh organic vegetables. The way to avoid wastage is to store your vegetables in your home. It is true that some vegetables are easier to store than others but most organic vegetables can be stored and saved in some way or another.

There are actually many ways to store your harvest so do not get frustrated if you feel that you have grown more than you can eat. Many grocery stores sell mason jars and supplies needed for making preserves and canning vegetables along with instructions on how to do this. The same stores sell cheesecloth which is great for placing vegetables on when drying if they are air drying.

Food dehydrators can also be used for drying your vegetables along with your oven. When using an oven to dry vegetables set it for the lowest setting, usually 140 degrees, and watch carefully to make sure the vegetables are drying out and not roasting.

### **Lettuce**

Once you have harvested all of your lettuce you can wash it, remove the core, and pat it dry with a towel. When you have finished store it in a plastic bag and put it in your refrigerator's crisping section. This will help your lettuce remain crisp for up to a week.

Since it is harder to store vegetables for a long period of time it is recommended that you harvest your lettuce and start using it even before it has reached full growth. When it has reached full growth use what you can, store what you can use, and offer the rest to friends and family members. They will appreciate some fresh organic salad to use in their salads or to place on their sandwiches.

### **Root Vegetables**

Root vegetables can often store longer than the other vegetables you harvest as long as they are harvested on time and correctly. Make sure your vegetables have not been bruised or damaged during the harvest. If they have been damaged throw them away since the spoilage can spread if you are not careful.

Many root vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, and more can be stored in a cool, dark, dry place such as a root cellar or some pantries. Other root vegetables (carrots) can be dried with a food dehydrator or even in an oven set to a very low heat setting. Some vegetables such as turnips can even be stored in a refrigerator crisper, especially if they are going to be used soon.

## **Tomatoes**

There are many ways to store tomatoes and that is a great thing since tomatoes are popular with many organic gardeners. Tomatoes can be stored well on a counter top or in a window sill if they are still a bit green. They can also be stored in the refrigerator.

Some people will dry tomatoes for later use in sauces or even preserve them. Tomatoes preserves either sweet preserves with ripened tomatoes or pickle preserves with green tomatoes can be a winter time treat.

## **Onions**

Onions will store wonderfully in any dry, dark place. As long as the onions have not been bruised and have no sign of moisture they can be stored in a pantry or attic for a long time.

## **Beans and Peas**

Beans and peas can often be harvested as needed but once it is time to store them there are several methods that can be used. Peas and beans can both be stored in bags in the refrigerator for several days. They also can be canned with the proper equipment. Beans can also be dried which is a popular way to store them. Once beans are dried and bagged they can later be soaked and cooked.

## **Corn**

Corn can be stored in the refrigerator or, once the husk is removed, frozen for a long time. The kernels can also be dried, stored, and creamed at a later date.

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