

Organic Gardening

What does 'organic' growing mean?

The Government of Canada broadly defines 'organic production' as:

A holistic system designed to optimize the productivity and fitness of diverse communities within the agro-ecosystem, including soil organisms, plants, livestock, and people. The principal goal of organic production is to develop enterprises that are sustainable and harmonious with the environment.

Growing plants organically refers to a series of growing practices that do not rely on the use of synthetically derived fertilizers or pesticides. Rather, naturally occurring fertilizers, such as compost, manures, and kelp or fish emulsions, are used. While natural pesticides, like insecticidal soap, *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki* (a bacteria that disrupts caterpillar feeding), and pyrethrum (derived from chrysanthemums), are permitted within organic growing practices, there is also an emphasis on optimizing plant and soil health to achieve resiliency.

To receive the 'organic' label inputs from which a product are derived (ex: fertilizers, soils, preservatives, etc.) must be found on the 'Permitted Substances Lists for Organic Production' and the final consumer-ready product must be comprised of no less than 95% organic ingredients.

Why choose to grow organically?

Individuals choose to grow organically for a variety of reasons. Some prefer the taste and quality of organic foods, others do it because they support the environmentally friendly practices that organic growing encourages. Organic gardening has been shown to reduce waste outputs (through composting), improve soil quality (both in structure and fertility), reduce soil loss, and encourage biodiversity.

How do I start my organic garden?

Start by building up your soil's organic content through the addition of peat, compost, and/or green manures (cover crops that are tilled into your soil). Consider 'Lasagna Gardening': In the fall lay down newspaper or cardboard and cover it with compost and mulch. This will add organic compost and smother weeds. In the early spring amend your beds with lime and organic fertilizer. For fertilizer, you can use commercially available products or your own compost. Of course, you can also always consider the age-old Newfoundland practice of 'cutting in' (mixing) washed up seaweed and kelp.

