

Cold frame made from recycled wood

Becoming an organic gardener

When you are developing an organic garden there may be initial problems with pests and diseases until the system of producing garden compost, developing a healthy soil and attracting wildlife has become established. Organic gardening needs a bit more attention to cultivation methods but there's plenty of advice and support around and the rewards are great. Join us, Borders Organic Gardeners, to benefit from our shared garden experience.

The five key elements of organic gardening are:

1. Nurturing a healthy soil.
2. Preventing damage to crops by pests and diseases.
3. Encouraging wildlife into the garden.
4. Avoiding the use of chemicals.
5. Using resources responsibly.

Find out more online

Search for further information using key terms. Trusted sources are Garden Organic, the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and our own Borders Organic Gardeners website. Videos on YouTube can be useful if they are based on organic principles and relevant to your local conditions.

Published by Borders Organic Gardeners

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Designed and printed by Footeprint UK, Jedburgh, on recycled paper

What is Organic Gardening?



BOG

Borders Organic Gardeners

www.bordersorganicgardeners.org



Beans mulched with grass cuttings

Organic gardening works with nature to maintain soil fertility and to control pests, diseases and weeds. It recognises the interdependence of living things. Organic gardens are rich in nature and interest, full of life. They produce tasty vegetables with zero food miles, free from artificial chemicals.

Nurturing healthy soil

Healthy soil is the basis of the organic garden. Soil teems with living organisms: earthworms, insects, fungi, bacteria and countless others. The bacteria release nutrients which are needed by the plants, and the plants release sugars which feed the bacteria. Organic gardeners work with this system. We feed the soil with garden compost and protect the soil's surface with mulches such as chipped bark or cardboard. We disturb the soil's structure as little as possible, by avoiding digging.

The idea is to **feed the soil** rather than the plant. This creates a fertile healthy soil which produces vigorous plants able to resist attack by pests and diseases. Soils are being degraded by modern chemical agriculture, while organic growers are committed to improving their soils.

Preventing damage by pests and diseases

The organic gardener takes prompt action to prevent a build-up of problems. **Netting** or **mesh** protects plants from insects and birds. Slugs are deterred by barriers such as grit. Organic gardeners choose **varieties of plants** which resist disease and which grow well in local conditions. We avoid the build-up of pests and diseases by growing annual vegetables in rotation, in different places from year to year. We discourage wild plants which compete with chosen plants, stopping them from setting seed and digging out the roots of invasive perennials.



Mesh protecting crops

Encouraging wildlife

Organic gardeners promote wildlife by **providing wilder areas** where insects, small mammals, frogs and toads can thrive. We plant flowers, which attract pollinating insects, and trees and shrubs for birds to nest in. Some insects depend on a particular plant to survive: for example, nettles feed the caterpillars of several types of butterflies. The organic garden is a **refuge for wildlife**. This also benefits the gardener because the birds, toads, frogs and beetles will eat the slugs, snails, aphids and caterpillars. If you attract thrushes to your garden, they will eat the snails. **Don't use chemicals** to control pests because they kill beneficial creatures as well.

Using resources responsibly

The soil in organic gardens is rich in carbon. Organic gardeners **avoid releasing carbon** into the atmosphere as it contributes to climate change. We **don't use peat**, which should be left undisturbed to store carbon. Chemical weedkillers and fertilisers are made using fossil fuels – another reason to avoid them. Plastic is also made from fossil fuels and we use it as little as possible. Organic gardeners are enthusiastic **recyclers** who use resources responsibly. We use kitchen waste, plant material and other materials to **make our own garden compost**.