

# *The Organic Approach to Gardening*

By Alfred H. Krautter

## Vegetable Garden



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## Introduction

If there is one reason to go organic, it is to grow organic vegetables on your property. Vegetables require a sunny location and well drained rich organic soil. Most people will section off a special area on their property to grow them in. These areas can be fenced in to keep animals and rodents out. We have a pamphlet in the Garden Center on how to fence in a vegetable garden. Raised beds have become popular in the vegetable garden and drip irrigation can save you time and provides plants with the necessary water for their survival.

It is often difficult to find a location for your vegetable garden that will fit in aesthetically. Side gardens or gardens behind structures often work out. Foreground planting filled with perennials and flowers can soften these gardens. If you have turned your whole property into an organic program, you can plant your vegetables wherever you want, and if you are clever enough and creative enough they will become part of your landscape design. This concept is called Edible Landscaping and dates back to ancient Egyptian times.. While many gardeners would like to grow their own vegetables they do not have the time or the space. However they would love to pick a few fresh tomatoes or gather some fresh herbs. Integrating vegetables with perennials, annuals and flowering shrubs goes along with the organic concept. The greater the mix the greater the success. I am fully integrating vegetable plants on my own property and finding it an exciting challenge in Landscape Design.

Growing good vegetables requires a good understanding of organics. Once you have selected your site and designated a specific area you will need to prepare your soil. The *Preparation of a New Planting Bed* below is essential.

It is important to plan your vegetable garden. A lot depends on the size of your plot and the amount of space you are willing to give up for this garden. Large vegetable gardens lend themselves to row planting and fencing in of the plot to prevent animal damage. Raised beds can produce a more intensified planting. Container planting can afford another choice where little or no adequate land is available. Whatever your choices are it will be beneficial for you to decide what crops you want to grow and to plan where you will place them. Vegetable gardens are not particularly pretty to look at so foreground planting them with perennials and annuals can make them look more attractive. Although rectangular designs are more efficient for planting you can play with various shapes and designs to see what fits into your overall scheme.

Growing vegetables organically is more nutritious. The microbes in an organic soil work as decomposers breaking the organic matter down into macro- and micro-nutrients. This diverse mixture of nutrients makes for a better tasting and more nutritious vegetable.

Vegetables require different times to be planted. We break them down into three groups:

- **Cool weather crops** should be planted about 2 weeks before the last frost. They include Beets, Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Celery, Garden Peas, Lettuce, Onions, Radishes, Spinach, Turnips.
- **Warm weather crops** should be planted just after the last date of frost. They include Cantaloupes, Carrots, Chard, Corn, Cucumbers, Peppers, Potatoes, Pumpkins, Snap beans, Squash Tomatoes.
- **Hot Weather crops** should be planted about 3 weeks after the last frost. They include Eggplant, Field peas, Lima beans, Okra, Shell beans, Sweet potatoes, Watermelons.

**Harvesting:** The art of harvesting your vegetables at the right time is important. The basic rule is to harvest your vegetables early and often. If you eat your vegetables on the same day that they are harvested and if they are harvested at the right time you will be eating them at their greatest nutritional value. This will require tending to your garden frequently.

**Watering:** Watering is the most critical aspect of growing a good plant. In most cases overhead watering will result in disastrous results. Drip irrigation is my watering method of choice. We can help you set up simple inexpensive systems that can be attached to your faucet with an automatic timer. If you chose to water by hand water the roots not the foliage. Water deeply and less frequently. A good grower will spot-water plants that are dry rather than watering everything. Too much or too little water can be detrimental to your plants. Most vegetables need a half inch to an inch of water each week.

**Staking:** Plants that need staking require constant attention. Tomatoes need to be attached to their growing structure as they grow. Many vegetables require trellises to keep them off the ground. Check the Garden Center for the many methods of staking that are available to you.

**Weeding:** It is important to keep up with weeding from the start. Mulching is beneficial for your plants as well as aiding in weed control. In difficult to control weed areas apply double layers of newspaper covered with a 3-inch layer of mulch. Weed in the evening or early morning hours. Weed seeds exposed to sunlight germinate rapidly.

**Fencing:** Where rabbits, woodchucks, deer and other animals are a problem, fencing may be your best answer. Use an inexpensive chicken wire fence. Bury 18" to 2 feet facing to the outside of the garden. Attach it to stakes three feet tall and leave 1 foot above the stake unattached. A friend saw a woodchuck go to the fence and start to dig under. It hit the underground fence, then backed up and dug again with the same result. It dug again and after, finally giving up and attempting to climb up the fence. The weight of the woodchuck on the unattached top foot of the fence propelled it backward to the ground. The woodchuck had enough and gave up.

## Preparation of a New Planting Bed

To have a great garden you have to prepare the soil properly. A “clayey soil” is sticky and wet to the touch. When it dries out, it becomes hard and difficult to work. Clay particles are extremely small. Alone, it makes a poor soil. It compacts easily, preventing air and water from circulating. Root penetration is limited and plant growth is stunted. Clay soils can become good soils if the proper ingredients are mixed in. Most Westchester soils are heavy clay. Sandy soils are a rarity in Westchester while prevalent on Long Island. Sand particles are large and such a soil does not have moisture- or nutrient-retentive abilities. Oddly enough, the same formula will rectify both conditions. Proper drainage is essential to the planting bed area. If poor drainage is present, it needs to be rectified either through dry wells, drainage pipes diverting the water, or the building of berms to go above the wet area.

We recommend that all weeds be removed, then the products listed be spread evenly in layers on existing soil and dug in or rototilled into at least a 1 foot depth. Once this is done, you can follow our monthly calendar and this step will not be necessary in the following years.

### **Per 100 square feet, dig and mix into the top one foot area:**

- 2 3.8 cu. ft. bales peat moss
- 2 40 lb. bags of *Coast of Maine*® *Lobster Mix* compost
- 2 40 lb. bags of *Coast of Maine*® *Penobscot Mix* compost
- 2 bags *Hoffman*® *Cow Manure*
- 2 bags *Fafard*® *Peat Humus*
- 1 lb. *Mother Earth*® *Paramagnetic Mineral Rock Dust*
- 5 lb. lime
- 5 lb. bone meal
- 6 lb. *Organica*® *Plant Booster Plus*
- 5 lb. *Espoma*® *Plant Tone*

## March

### *Mother Earth Organics® Paramagnetic Mineral Rock Dust*

Application rate 10 lbs. Per 1,000 sq. ft. Mimics the actions of Mother Nature by replacing minerals once spread via glaciers, flooding and wind. Using *Paramagnetic Mineral Rock Dust* on your land is a sound organic practice beneficial to living soil. The results are astounding and speak for themselves. Optimal organic soil produces prime, healthy plants. This product will re-mineralize depleted soils, improve soil structure, and catalyze soil biology. Paramagnetic 0-0-2. Guaranteed analysis is: Nitrogen=0.0%, Phosphorus=0.079%, Soluble Potash=2.75%, Calcium=3.0%, Iron=6.0%, Magnesium=1.5%, Manganese=0.102%. Paramagnetic rock is gaining popularity for its positive influence on soil and plants. Complete mineral list on [www.motherearth.com](http://www.motherearth.com).

### *Espoma® Plant Tone 5-3-3*

Application rate 50 lbs. per 2,500 sq. ft. 1 lb of nitrogen/ 1,000 sq. ft. Plant-tone is a complete plant food containing all of the essential nutrients. The purpose is to fill the soil with as many organics as we can find in one product. *Plant Tone* is a complete and well balanced organic fertilizer which will not burn your plants. In heavily mulched beds, apply this product to the surface and rains will bring the product down to soil level. Hoe or pull any weeds that come up between the mulch. On bare areas you can rake these materials in lightly. As new weed seeds germinate you can easily cultivate reducing the number of weed seeds in the ground at planting time. Organic ingredients: Dehydrated manure, feather meal, crab meal, coco meal, corn gluten, bone meal, dried blood, sunflower meal, kelp meal, alfalfa meal, green sand, rock phosphate, sulfate of potash, magnesia, and humates.

## April

Add organic matter. Cow manure, bone meal, *Lobster Blend* and *Penobscot Blend*. These are organic products that you should incorporate into your soil at planting time. If you are planting whole beds, pull your mulch away, layer these products, rake or spade in and re-apply the mulch when you have finished planting. If your mulch has broken down; incorporate it into the soil. If you are pocketing plants in your landscape, pull mulch away from areas you are going to plant and top dress with these items.

## May

Use *Organica® Plant Booster Plus* at planting time to ensure microbial activity in your soil, reduce transplant shock and ensure strong plant growth. Contains natural and organic nutrients: feather meal, steamed bone meal, and sulfate of potash. Inoculated with beneficial microbes for a patented biologically enhanced fertilizer.

If you have not already done so, we recommend that you follow the March and April product application instructions. Once your garden is planted make sure you apply a two inch layer of mulch.

## June

*Organica® Kelp Booster*. 20 lbs. covers 5,000 sq. ft. Promotes root growth and increases disease resistance for healthy plant growth and development. A natural bio-stimulant comprised of 30% calcium and kelp. Calcium is essential for plant growth and development. Kelp is rich in plant growth compounds, micronutrients, amino acids and vitamins.

Keep a vigilant eye out for insects or diseases and treat early with an organic solution before it reaches epidemic proportions. Inspect your garden on a weekly basis. It is essential to eliminate weeds. Make sure plants get adequate water. Water the soil, as overhead watering leads to disease and poor fruiting. Apply beneficial insects to reduce potential problems. Keep a slug problem under control by applying Diatomaceous Earth or Slug-Go.

## July

*Organica® Plant Growth Activator* contains beneficial soil bacteria to create a healthy soil foundation. Also contains natural growth components such as amino acids, vitamins, biotin, folic acid and sugars. Water this product in well once it has been applied. Microbes want to be close to the roots.

Keep your plants evenly watered to avoid cracking and splitting. Avoid overhead watering by using drip irrigation. Keep your beds weed free. Check plants for insect damage and if present use an organic control early on. Many crops may need staking or hilling. Check for slug damage.

## August

Apply *Feedback® Liquid Compost*, a complete gourmet meal for soil bacteria. Make sure your plants are mulched and keep them well watered. Keep the water off the flowers and the foliage. Water thoroughly and deeply rather than too frequently. Ground covers can be overhead watered but leaves should be dry by nightfall.

## September

Apply *Neptune's Harvest Fish & Seaweed Fertilizer*, a liquid all natural organic fertilizer that combines several species of fish, has no offensive odor, cold processed, no oils or proteins removed, no chlorine and won't clog the sprayer. Combining this with kelp makes it an incredible product. The Kelp is derived from seaweed harvested from Nova Scotia having 60 naturally occurring major and minor nutrients, carbohydrates, amino acids and naturally occurring plant growth promoting substances which enhance crop yields, quality and vigor.

## **October**

Top dress with compost. As crops have been harvested, remove plants to avoid insect or disease complications and compost them. Add leaves and other materials to develop a rich compost. If this process was done the year before, mix this compost into the bare areas. If not, incorporate *Coast of Maine® Lobster Compost* and *Coast of Maine® Penobscot Blend* into the bare areas. Keep the bare areas cultivated, allowing birds to feed on grubs and other hidden larvae. A weed reduction technique for next year's crops is frequent cultivation to prevent weed seeds from developing yet allow existing seeds to germinate.

## **November**

Plant a cover crop. We carry Winter Rye seeds for this purpose. Cover crops decompose into organic compost. They keep weeds crowded out of the garden and prevent erosion. Turned into the soil it adds great nutritional value.

## **December – February**

Add a high calcium lime to the soil to keep the ph acid. Westchester soils are a good growing level for most vegetables that you will plant the following year.