

# 50 Organic Gardening Tips

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1. Mulch your flower beds and trees with 3" of organic material - it conserves water, adds humus and nutrients, and discourages weeds. It gives your beds a nice, finished appearance.
2. Mulch acid-loving plants with a thick layer of pine needles each fall. As the needles decompose, they will deposit their acid in the soil.
3. The most important step in pest management is to maintain healthy soil. It produces healthy plants, which are better able to withstand disease and insect damage.
4. Aphids? Spray infested stems, leaves, and buds with a very dilute soapy water, then clear water. It works even on the heaviest infestation.
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5. Compost improves soil structure, texture, and aeration, and increases the soil's water holding capacity. It also promotes soil fertility and stimulates healthy root development.
6. Look for natural and organic alternatives to chemical fertilizers, such as the use of compost. Our use of inorganic fertilizer is causing a toxic buildup of chemicals in our soil and drinking water.
7. When buying plants for your landscape, select well-adapted plant types for your soil, temperature range, and sun or shade exposure.
8. Landscaping your yard is the only home improvement that can return up to 200% of your original investment.
9. Plant trees! They increase in value as they grow and save energy and money by shading our houses in the summer, and letting the sun shine through for warmth in the winter.
10. Think of trees and their locations as the walls and roofs of our outdoor rooms, when you are planning their locations and sizes.
11. Grass won't grow? Find an appropriate ground cover for the exposed earth and fill the problem space, creating an interesting bed shape.
12. Plant vines on walls, fences, and overhead structures for quick shade, vertical softening, and colorful flower displays.

- 13.** If gourmet cooking is in your plans, organically grown herbs make wonderful landscape plants. They flavor foods, provide medicinal properties, and offer up fragrances. And most thrive on neglect.
- 14.** Shade gardens are low maintenance - they require less watering, slower growth, and fewer weeds to fight.
- 15.** Everyone loves flowers! Annuals are useful for a splash of one-season color. But since replacing them each year is expensive, concentrate them in just a few spots.
- 16.** There is no need to work the soil deeply when adding compost or soil amendments. Eighty five percent of a plant's roots are found in the top 6" of soil.
- 17.** The best organic matter for bed preparation is compost made from anything that was once alive, for example leaves, kitchen waste, and grass clippings.
- 18.** Dig an ugly hole when planting a tree or shrub. A hole with "glazed" sides from a shovel will restrict root penetration into the surrounding soil.
- 19.** Planting from plastic containers? Carefully remove the plant and tear the outside roots if they have grown solidly against the container.
- 20.** Think of mulching as "maintaining the forest floor": add 1" to 3" of compost or mulch to planting beds each year.
- 21.** Natural fertilizers, compost and organic materials encourage native earthworms. Earthworms are nature's tillers and soil conditioners, and manufacture great fertilizer.
- 22.** Bare soil should not be visible around a new planting. Always cover with a layer of mulch, any coarse-textured, loose organic material.
- 23.** Think "biodiversity". Using many different kinds of plants encourage many different kinds of beneficial insects to take up residence in your yard.
- 24.** Organic pest control is a comprehensive approach instead of a chemical approach. Create a healthy biodiversity so that the insects and microbes will control themselves. Using natural products and building healthy soil is the best long-term treatment for pests.
- 25.** Weeds? Spot-spray with common full-strength household vinegar, on a sunny day. It's an organic weed killer that's safe for you and the environment.
- 26.** Mulch! The rain and irrigation water runs off the land, eroding and depleting your unprotected soil.
- 27.** Residential users of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides apply more pounds per acre of

these chemicals than farmers do. As these pollutants run off, they harm aquatic life and contaminate the food chain. If you keep your soil healthy, you won't require chemical fertilizers.

**28.** Some mulching benefits are protection of roots from the sun's heat, and protection of plant crowns from winter cold.

**29.** To prevent diseases and pest infestation, avoid piling mulch against tree trunks. Spread mulch out as far as the drip line.

**30.** For effective weed control use a layer of coarse mulch 3" or more in depth. Some hardy grasses may need to be rooted out for successful removal.

**31.** For a good start, water the ground thoroughly before and after applying a mulch cover.

**32.** Use plants in your landscape that are either native to your area, or were imported from areas with similar climate and soil. They require a lot less water and care, and won't die off in the winter.

**33.** Compost is what happens when leaves, grass clippings, vegetable and fruit scraps, woodchips, straw, and small twigs are combined, then allowed to break down into a soil-like texture. Use it instead of commercial fertilizers.

**34.** Formal gardens are for you if you love symmetry. They work best around a focal point like a fountain, sculpture, specimen tree, or group of plants.

**35.** Some flowers, including sweet peas, iris, foxglove, amaryllis, lantana, lupines, clematis, datura, poinsettia, and oleander, are poisonous.

**36.** When buying annuals or perennials, select plants that are budded but not yet in bloom, so their energy the first two or three weeks in your garden will be directed toward making larger and stronger plants with better-developed root systems.

**37.** To increase water conservation, look for drought-resistant plants. Usually these plants have silver leaves, deep taproots and small leaves. Succulents are also able to withstand dry weather.

**38.** When planting, take into consideration the plant's size at maturity. Layer by height and bloom time for emphasis and constant color.

**39.** Soaker hoses deliver water directly to the base of the plant, reducing moisture loss from evaporation. Early morning is the best time of day to water.

**40.** Compost balances both acid and alkaline soils, bringing PH levels into the optimum range for nutrient availability. It contains micronutrients such as iron and manganese that

are often absent in synthetic fertilizers.

**41.** Avoid frequent, deep cultivation, which can damage plant roots, dry out the soil, disturb healthy soil organisms, and bring weed seeds to the surface where they will germinate.

**42.** Use the least-disruptive and least-polluting protections against a pest. Try the following methods as applicable: first physical removal, barriers, and traps; next, biological controls; then, appropriate botanical and mineral pesticides.

**43.** Red, orange, and yellow in your landscape will draw the eye and bring objects closer. To make a small garden feel larger, place warm colors in the front of the space and cool colors in the back.

**44.** Cover street noise - sound pollution can be minimized by the use of water features, such as a waterfall, or a pond with a fountain jet. Wind chimes also help, as can bird feeders that attract songbirds.

**45.** Newly planted trees need supplemental water to avoid transplant shock, so water deeply on a weekly basis throughout the growing season.

**46.** Give order to your garden by defining the boundaries with fences, stone walls, or hedges. Include paths for movement.

**47.** Less than 2 percent of the insects in the world are harmful. Beneficial insects such as ground beetles, ladybugs, fireflies, green lacewings, praying mantids, spiders, and wasps keep harmful insects from devouring your plants. They also pollinate your plants and decompose organic matter.

**48.** Plant newly purchased plants during the late evening or on a cloudy day. They have a much better chance of surviving if planted during cloudy, rainy weather than dry, sunny weather.

**49.** Compost introduces and feeds diverse life in the soil, including bacteria, insects, worms, and more, which support vigorous plant growth.

**50.** Bright light washes out the cool colors, blue, green, and purple. They are best used in shaded areas for maximum impact.