



5 Reasons to Go Organic in Your Garden

by Wes Duren

For your health (and your pets' health, too!) Countless studies have linked conventional chemical gardening pesticides and fertilizers to cancer as well as reproductive and neurological damage. Organic fertilizers and pest control products, on the other hand, are safe for both pets and humans. (Most of these products are derived from plant remains, animal waste and naturally derived minerals from both soil and water.)

For soil health. Soil is alive and teeming with microorganisms that help convert inactive minerals and water into the building blocks of life, reduce soil erosion and compaction, reduce soil-borne disease, break down soil pollutants, and much more. Studies even show that soil, with its many life forms, can reduce global warming by holding carbon in the soil rather than releasing it into the air.

Just one application of a chemical fertilizer, herbicide, insecticide, fungicide, and so on can kill soil organisms.

Tip: As an alternative to harmful chemical fertilizers and pesticides, you can improve the quality of your soil by simply adding compost, which helps to regenerate soil life and corrects many soil imbalances.

For wildlife health. Many recent studies have correlated the use of garden chemicals to a decline in the health of birds, land animals and aquatic life. Not only are these chemicals proven to have an immediate adverse impact on wildlife, but additionally, these chemicals are gradually accumulated in higher concentrations as they move up the food chain. For example, minute water life feed on pesticide tainted algae, a small fish then consumes many of these small water animals, which are then consumed by a larger fish. So the highest concentrations then show up in larger animals who consume more food, and consequently more pesticides.

Note: Scientific studies show that organic farms and gardens support a greater number and diversity of wild creatures than most conventionally managed farmland and residences. This means increased health and vitality in the garden. Additionally, by planting regional native shrubs, trees and perennials, you can attract even more wildlife to your garden.

For insect health (and, in turn, plant health). An estimated 80–90% of all insects have a beneficial impact on plants by pollinating the plants and reducing the number of pest insects around them. One application of a chemical pesticide can

eliminate many of these helpful critters. Even worse for your plants, pest insects recover more quickly after a pesticide application than do the beneficial insects, which simply compounds an infestation of pest insects in the long run.

The goal of organic control methods is not to eliminate pest insects, but to reduce their populations enough to prevent serious injury to plants. By mixing flowering plants with vegetables and fruits, you can increase the diversity of beneficial predator insects in your garden.

For the environment's future health. The idea that we don't inherit the earth from our ancestors but borrow it from our children is a compelling one; unfortunately, the conventional gardening world is wrought with "quick fix" products that bring with them many long-term repercussions. The hidden cost of chemical agriculture and gardening is tremendous: For example, the cost of cleaning up our drinking water to reduce pesticide content is now well over \$200 million a year in the U.S. alone. To the contrary, organic gardening causes little to no soil or water pollution, which helps create more sustainable agriculture and home gardens and encourages a healthier environment for future generations.

For every pest, disease or weed problem you may have, a safe and natural approach to correct that problem is available. This is a good time of year to consult your organic gardening professional to plan for a pesticide free year ahead.

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