

Marvin's Organic Gardens

by Beth Davis



Marvin's Organic Gardens is an organic gardeners' resource center, with helpful information and products to handle any gardening issue, no matter how large or small.

Marvin's Organic Gardens is a full-service nursery, landscape design company and retail and garden center located 25 miles north of downtown Cincinnati, in Lebanon. Marvin's Organic Gardens opened its doors in July 1999 and the nursery became USDA certified organic in 2003, making Marvin's the first and the largest USDA certified organic garden center in the Midwest.

According to M. Wesley Duren, landscape and construction vice president (and son of Marvin), Marvin's grows over 3,000 varieties of trees, shrubs, perennials, herbs, vegetables, grasses and annuals, with a focus on growing edibles plants and those native to Ohio.

"We also have a retail center where we provide safe and natural gardening solutions— from organic fertilizers and pest control products to rain barrels and eco-friendly garden art," says Duren. "We also offer a full range of landscape, construction and fertilization services." Duren says all of their services are approached with environmental and human health and safety in mind.

Duren explains that the family's love of organic practices goes back to the early 1970s, when his father, Marvin, served as a 101st Airborne Ranger during the Vietnam War. Marvin observed agent orange, a toxic herbicide similar to modern chemical herbicides, being sprayed over the mangrove and forested areas of Vietnam as a defoliant.

"Inadvertently, agent orange and many other toxic chemicals found their way into public drinking water and farm fields," continues Duren. "Marvin saw the damaging affects of thoughtless chemical warfare then, and made a commit-



Marvin Duren

ment to never use chemical pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or synthetic fertilizers." Over the past 30-plus years, Marvin has been practicing organic gardening methods and continually researches ways to make organic gardening easier and more affordable.

From a young age, Duren says his father inspired and instilled in him the many virtues of safe and natural gardening practices. "He introduced me to our natural surroundings including woodlands, wetlands, prairies, arboretums and botanical gardens," explains Duren. "From early on, I became passionate about plants, animals and our outdoor environment." With his father's help, he learned the names of many trees, shrubs, perennials, grasses and weeds. Today, both continue to learn new and ancient techniques useful for organic gardening, and enjoy teaching others what they learn through gardening and nursery practices.

According to Duren, the benefits of converting to organic gardening are numerous. Safety, he says, is the most important reason to go organic. Organic gardening practices and products are not only safer for human health, but also the health of our soil, water and air. It is safer for our pets and children, as it does not jeopardize their health or well-being. Organic gardening also encourages rich, healthy soils, more beneficial insects and microbial life, and can help make our gardens more hospitable to attracting birds and butterflies.

"Organic gardening practices work with the earth's natural processes, often requiring less work and money to maintain in the long run," notes Duren. "Responsible land stewardship is at the heart of organic gardening, and such practices

promote safe and simple gardening techniques that will help to sustain our communities for generations to come."

For someone just getting started with an organic garden, Duren suggests using compost, whether building a new flower or vegetable bed, rejuvenating an existing lawn or garden or just planting a tree. Compost is oil for the soil and helps to loosen our compacted clay soils, while making nutrients more accessible to plants, resisting soil compaction and lessening drought and disease stress. Healthy plants start with healthy soils, and compost is easy to use and cost effective.

"Compost happens naturally, so it is easy to make the most of it," Duren says. "By piling brush, grass clippings, food waste, leaf debris and garden soil, you can make your own free compost." And, he should know. Marvin's Organic Gardens has established one of the largest compost operations in southern Ohio, with over a million cubic yards in the making.

In addition to using compost, it is important to know that there is always a safe and organic solution for every insect pest, weed or disease issue. Resorting to toxic lawn and garden chemicals should never be an option because non-toxic gardening products and methods are plentiful. Marvin's Organic Gardens is an organic gardeners resource center, with helpful information and products to handle any gardening issue, no matter how large or small.

Many believe that going green when it comes to gardening is more expensive, but Duren says most of Marvin's organic gardening products and services are comparable in price, or less than their conventional counterparts. "Birds, bats, frogs, toads, beneficial bugs and soil organisms take care of many of the garden problems for us by encouraging their health and well being in our gardens."

Most organic gardening products also persist longer when applied in the landscape. It is more sustainable, and many of the cost saving benefits are seen in the long run. For instance, Duren notes that one application of Milky Spore, a bacterial product used to treat Japanese beetle grubs, can be effective in the soil for up to 30 years.

Education is an important aspect to the mission of Marvin's Organic Gardens. "We are proud to offer the community many educational classes, events and seminars throughout the year to help educate people about organics, composting, growing specifics and more," says Duren. "They are a great way to connect like-minded individuals and to share gardening experiences with each other. As a seminar presenter, I learn as much from our class attendees as they do from me."

Marvin's Organic Gardens is open Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday, Noon to 5 p.m. It is located at 2055 U.S. Route 42 in South Lebanon. Call 513-932-3319 or visit MarvinsOrganicGardens.com.



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