

Suburban Gardener

Procedures Outlined
For Organic Gardening

By BETTY FRANKEL

"Organic Gardening" may be the key to our well-being.

It is a system for growing nourishing food and beautiful flowers on fertile soil without the use of chemicals or pesticides. It is using Nature's methods of conservation by recycling all wastes back into the soil by composting.

Certainly organic gardening is not a new idea. In fact, it's downright old-fashioned, using gardening methods that have been known for centuries—long before modern chemical fertilizers and pesticides were invented.

Many gardeners dedicated to organic gardening belong to a group called "The Organic Gardening Club." Every year, for many years past, this group has sponsored a display at the Detroit Flower Show. To most of us the methods they advocated seemed needlessly archaic and therefore quite eccentric.

Why not use the fertilizers which made everything grow so well and the DDT which killed bugs so easily?

Why not, indeed?

NOW THAT public attention has turned to water pollution, air pollution, the dangers of pesticides, the problems caused by fertilizers getting into streams and lakes, and the problems caused by detergents, enzymes and brighteners in laundry products, we begin to realize the wisdom of their ways.

Oliver Dunstan, a member of the Royal Oak Organic Gardening Club, in a recent lecture to the Farmington Garden Club outlined the procedures for organic gardening.

Most important is the compost pile which he likened to a kitchen for the garden. In the compost pile food is prepared for the soil.

The compost pile can be started at any time of year. Set aside an out of the way area because it is not a thing of beauty. A low fence or other enclosure makes it neater, but is not essential.

Make a flat, loose pile of grass clippings, fallen leaves, pulled weeds and all soft green parts of plants removed from the garden. However do not put on any diseased or infected material.

Vegetable peelings, apple cores, melon skins and other kitchen wastes can also go on the pile. Keep it loose so air can circulate. Don't compact it.

AFTER SIX or eight inches of plant remains have been put on the pile spread a thin layer of garden soil or some of last year's compost and then pile on more clippings, leaves and weeds. The soil provides the bacteria needed to decay the vegetation and break it down into usable humus.

The pile should be kept moist. If the top is shaped like a saucer, water will be collected rather than shed.

It's a good idea to turn the pile over once or twice during the season to make sure it is well aerated. A supply of oxygen is essential so the bacteria can do their work. The decay process is essentially a form of oxidation—a slow "burning". In fact, a compost pile gets quite warm. Even freezing winter temperatures heat inside the pile can be higher than 80 degrees.

Withing a year the compost will have been converted into rich, crumbly humus just right for adding to flower beds, mulching shrubs, or top-dressing lawns. It's as good as any humus you can buy—and doesn't cost a cent.

If fine material is wanted the compost can be put through a screen. Coarser material is best for digging into the soil to improve the texture.

IT IS THE humus, or decayed organic material, in the soil which changes it from sterile sand or worthless clay to good, rich fertile soil on which plants can grow.

The humus provides essential nutrients in a form the plants can use. Equally important, it improves the texture of the soil so that it is porous and oxygen can penetrate to the plant roots. Humus also makes the soil spongy so it can retain a supply of water.

The gardener can't have too much compost. It is a valuable natural resource. It is a way of returning to the soil what has been taken from it by plant growth. It is the "recycling" that ecologists are advocating.

When the high-nitrogen fertilizers are put on lawns and gardens the plants put on a lot

of growth, much of which is not very sturdy. Also a lot of the nitrogen leaches down into the water table and is never used by the plants. It is this excess that filters down or else gets into streams through runoff that is causing algae scum and weeds to choke our streams and lakes.

DUNSTAN ALSO stated that chemical fertilizers have a "carrier" of inert material mixed with the active chemicals. This "carrier" remains in the soil after the nitrogen and other elements have been used or dissipated. As this accumulates it results in a layer of hard-pans that prevents water from penetrating into the soil.

Lime can be used to counteract it, but it is better to avoid forming it in the first place. If fertilizers are needed, Dunstan suggests natural rock phosphates which last several years. There are also some organic fertilizers available. "Milorganite", produced by the city of Milwaukee from treated sewage has been on the market for many years and works well on lawns and garden beds.

"Fish fertilizer", made from fish, is a liquid concentrate that is easy to apply and effective.

What do the organic gardeners do to control insects and diseases in the garden?

First of all, they contend that a healthy plant grown on soil rich in natural humus will be sturdier and more resistant to diseases. Check the garden regularly and remove and burn infected plants or plant parts. Prompt removal checks the spread.

Many insects can be picked off by hand and put into a paper bag and burned. Also, plant trees and shrubs that attract birds and put up birdhouses. Birds are the gardeners' best friends and consume

vast quantities of insects and insect eggs.

WE HAVE BECOME so dependent on chemical assistance that it may be difficult to accept a few chewed blossoms or spotted leaves or scabby apples. We must lower our standards of perfection a little bit and look at the total ecological picture.

If you are not totally converted to organic gardening and spraying seems essential, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources has published a list of the chemicals that are safe to use, and a list of those that should not be used.

The long-lasting, slow breakdown chemicals that are most harmful and should not be used include DDT, Heptachlor, Aldrin, Endrin, Dieldrin, Lindane, Toxaphene, Chlordane, and Benzene Hexachloride (BHC).

Those that are recommended are Methoxychlor, Malathion, Pyrethrum, Rotenone, Abate, and Naled or Dibrom. Remember that these are also poisons, but they do break down quickly so they do not accumulate in soil and water and people.

Warblers Visit

The Kirtlands Warbler Management Area near Mio, Mich., is the only place in the world where the Kirtlands Warblers nest, according to the Michigan Tourist Council. Permits to visit the area are



USE SHRUBS AND BUSHES -- Shrubs and flowering bushes are an important part of any garden. The otherwise-plain garden wall above has been immensely enhanced by the planting of bushes in a variety of types, sizes, and colors.



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Toys Can Be Homemade

Children's toys don't have to be elaborate, according to Mrs. Gail Imig, family life specialist at Michigan State University.

Toys should satisfy the child's basic developmental needs," Mrs. Imig said, "and many homemade toys do this better than ones you can buy." For instance, children should have something to swing on. "This develops their arm and

leg muscles and helps coordination," Mrs. Imig said. She suggested such things as the familiar rubber tire hung from the tree, or a gunny sack partially stuffed with sawdust, sand and straw.

"FOR OLDER children, a heavy rope with big knots serves this need very well." A great outlet for extra energy or hostile feelings is the punching bag.

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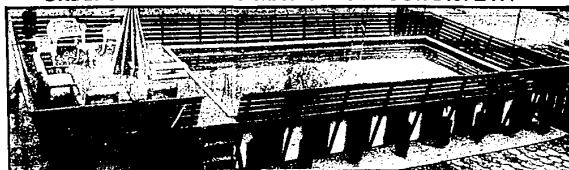
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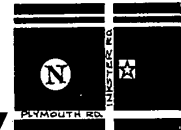
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