

Organic Gardening - How to Get Started

By Maheswari



Over the years I have met many people who want to garden but just don't know how to start. Some feel intimidated, some are overly anxious and want to begin by planting a large plot with a variety of plants, and some are shy and confused. What I have learned both through my own personal experience and from consulting with new gardeners is that the best and most successful way to get your hands in the dirt and grow your first veggies is to start small.

What I mean by small is to plant your first veggies, herbs and flowers in a container. And, you must do it yourself. What you learn by doing it yourself, instead of relying on friends and well-meaning family members, is how a plant grows. Over time your confidence level will develop and you will slowly begin to expand your learning and abilities to grow more and more food. Even if your first plant dies, don't give up. I think of it as compost for my plants. I dig a hole in the soil, bury the dead plant, cover it up and plant another veggie on top of it. It's all good.

Begin by deciding what you want to plant, taking into consideration whether your pots will be in partial or full sun. Here is a list of container plants from Seattle Tilth. Don't worry if you cannot find these particular varieties—organic plant starts from your local grocery store or nursery will work fine.

Basil 'Fino Verde' - Grows to be a small, dense bush, suitable for containers

Broccoli 'Purple Peacock' - 70 days. A cross between Green Goliath broccoli and two different kales, its leaves will remind you of Red Russian Kale.

Chives - A member of the onion family, this compact perennial makes a great addition to potted combinations. It can be used to attract beneficial insects when it is blooming. Clip the chives to add to your food and salads and eat the flowers too.

Eggplant 'Swallow' - 51 days. Glossy purple-black tender fruit, elongated oriental type, popular in cold climate (but it does require a sufficiently sunny spot)

Romaine Lettuce 'Forellenschluss' - 50 days. Open pollinated. Rare Austrian Heirloom. Strikingly beautiful light green leaves with maroon dappling. This loose romaine is mild, sweet, and sumptuous with many flavors in one leaf. Slow to bolt and a Seattle Tilth favorite!

Mint 'Chocolate Peppermint' - Fresh chocolate scent and flavor, 24" tall, grows in partial shade to full sun. Great in pots.

Hot Pepper 'Bulgarian Carrot Chile' - 70-80 days Heirloom. Colored like a polished fluorescent-orange carrot. Hot thin-

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walled tapered fruits up to 3 1/2", 18" tall, intense fruity flavor, which finishes hot.

Alpine Strawberry 'Alexandria'

Open pollinated. red fruits twice the size of wild berries. compact, heavy blooming plants produce large amounts of fragrant, tasty strawberries from spring through fall.

Cherry Tomato 'Oregon Cherry' - 60 days. Determinate. An early cherry tomato. The small-fruited red tomatoes are 1 1/2 inches long by 1 inch wide, and load up heavy on 1 1/2 feet tall by 2 feet wide determinate plants, sweet flavor and are a reliable PNW treat.

Gourmet Salad Mix - 45-55 days. Open pollinated. A delightful early summer blend of colorful mild greens designed to give you a staggered season of harvest.

Nasturtium 'Empress of India'

Beautiful deep red blossoms set off the blue green foliage on this mounding variety of nasturtium. Flowers and leaves are edible and have a peppery watercress flavor.

Mint 'Peppermint Candy'

A spreading perennial with mint-flavored leaves. Preferred for peppermint flavoring in cooking. Plant in a container.

Garden Sorrel

Large-leafed greens have a very sour, lemon flavor. Delicious in soups and salads, high in vitamin C. Grows in sun or part shade, drought tolerant.

Calendula - A bright yellow edible flower.

Stevia

Sweet Herb of Paraguay, Stevia is probably the sweetest plant in the world, 300 times sweeter than sugar! Perfect for iced tea, or leaves can be dried, ground, and added to recipes. Full sun, tender perennial, mulch in winter.

Low growing, dwarf or trailing herbs: Marjoram, thyme, rosemary, oregano.

I have my plants, now what?

Find a container suitable for at least three plants. I suggest combining a vegetable, an herb and a flower.

Here are a couple of combinations:

1. Bulgarian Carrot Chile in the center of the pot, surrounded by chives and nasturtiums'.
2. Cherry tomato in the center of the pot, surrounded by basil and calendula flowers.
3. Eggplant in the center, surrounded by oregano and calendula flowers
4. Salad container – Purple Peacock Broccoli, Romaine lettuce, Chives, Garden Sorrel

Among my favorite containers are the large metal pots that I buy at Home Depot. They are wide and deep enough for most vegetable plants. (pot photo)

I begin by filling the pot with dirt, using Edna's Best Organic Potting Soil. Once the pot is full, I take a hammer and medium size nail and punch holes along the lower outside of the container for drainage. After making the holes, I wet the soil in the container with water. You can use a watering can or a hose with an attachment set on "shower". The object is to compact the soil without making it soggy. Then I fill the pot with more soil and wet it again.

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If the plant starts are dry in their store containers, add some water to them before removing them from the pots. That will help the roots to settle in better in their new planter. Make a hole in the soil of your new container and gently remove the plant from its pot and place it in the hole. Gently pat the soil tightly around the roots of the plant. You can water your plants after they are planted, rinse your hands and pat yourself on the back. You have just planted your first garden!!

I suggest purchasing a water meter at any gardening center. It has a prong that you insert in the soil and it will let you know how wet the soil is below the surface. You don't want to under water or overwater your new garden. I also recommend buying a bag of Dr. Earth organic vegetable fertilizer. It is organic and you can keep your plants well-nourished throughout the growing season. Just follow the directions on the back. Please feel free to email me if you need support or a shoulder to cry on if you lose a beloved plant. pnwgreenfriends@gmail.com



Stories and Reflections

From Sri Lalita on Vason Island:

RAW Dog Treats for people juicing - a GREAT way to use your juice scraps:

I make raw dehydrated dog treats from my green juice scraps...(no citrus)

bind with all or choice of : flax seeds, sunflower seeds, chia, or ? ...and juice/water/broth

Add ins : nut butter, dried fruit, brewers yeast, garlic, maple, Himalayan salt - or endless possibilities

Spread on a dehydrator sheet or shape into cookies/crackers and dehydrate until crisp.

My guys LOVE them !

From Sri Lalita on Vason Island:

Just wanted to share a HUGE WOW moment with you !!

We're working our garden and raised beds this week....ahhhh-hhhh the beautiful sunshine...

Last Fall we partially emptied out some tall beds we have (3x3x4) and filled them with partially-done worm compost bin 'stuff' - worms and all..... needed to make room for more food waste in the bin and make sure we were set for the winter.

Well....Tuesday we went to move it to the raised beds to amend....and WOW OH WOW...it's black GOLD.

Beautiful...dark black, fine fine fine and rich.

We just refilled the tall bed with more compost stuff from the bin - we're overflowing...and since it worked sooo great, we're going to use it as our secondary phase worm bin.

Also we made it thru the winter with lots of worms and they worked all winter long.

We covered the bin with a weighted down tarp and that helped A LOT.

Last winter the bin got tooooooooo wet.

The tarp solved the problem.

From Stanley in Grayland:

We just had the beach cleanup on Saturday and also arranged a pre cleanup gathering on Thursday for the "dump" in front of our house (neighbor's house).....the reason I mention it is because a small group of "intentioned" beings literally

Stories and Reflections - cont.

changed our neighbor's lots and sent six pickup loads to the container for the beach cleanup, all in under two hours..... congratulations on the 4 grand grant.....we will be sending the "butt crew" blessings and uplifting joyful counting mantra thoughts during the cleanup..... I wish you Love Joy & Blessings on this ONE-der-FULL Earth Day

From Kalavati on vacation in Hawaii:

The day that Seattle Satsang had scheduled the Earth Day litter clean-up I was in Hawaii on a yoga retreat. So, I decided to join everyone back on the "Mainland" and do a litter-clean-up on Maui. During my stay there, I had found the energy of the Island itself to be profoundly healing and loving, so it made sense that I spend even a little bit of my time there showing my appreciation to Mother Nature.



I chose to walk the main road that leads up into the mountains away from the beach town of Paia. Around me were rolling green hills, singing birds, and blooming flowers, and down below me I could see the sparkling blue ocean spanning out into what looked like infinity. I was surprised by just how much garbage, fast food wrappers, soda cans and the like I found on the side of this rural road. The place seemed like paradise; I couldn't imagine why people would willingly throw so much garbage out of their cars, why they wouldn't want to respect the beauty of the place. Maybe they were

so used to its beauty they didn't realize how special it was. I thought if it was just that people liked throwing garbage out of their car windows, that maybe they could start parking next to garbage cans!

From Julia in Seattle:

I picked up trash at the Brown Bear carwash in Shoreline for 1/2 an hour. I found 2 tennis rackets in one of the trash cans, and I am going to donate them to Goodwill. I also found a car battery and got a \$5.00 gift card for recycling it. If you find old car batteries, you can usually get \$5-7 dollars per battery at some recycling stations.

From Visala in Seattle:

Follow-up from project making cigarette butt cans to place near bars-

Distributed almost all of my 18 cigarette cans. Went tonight to walk the dog with Gaurang. We emptied the cans and got half a bag of butts. It was really funny! That much in just 1 day. So far no one has moved the cans. I only asked permission at one place. Since the kids had helped paint them, I said it was a "Kid Project." The man was very happy to help the "Kids". That one was right outside of a smoke shop.

Anyway, the cans seem to be working! Yay! I told Aparna, that next week at satsang she can help paint some cans. She is excited about it.

Earth Day 2013

The Seattle PNW Litter Project celebrated Earth Day on Sunday April 7 (even though the actual Earth Day was on April 22). When we woke up that morning, we discovered it was 40 degrees, windy and very wet. Six hardy souls braved the elements and met at Cal Anderson Park at 10 a.m. It was the fun to work together once again. There were still a lot of cigarette butts in the park when we left, but seven pounds of them went to TerraCycle rather than the land fill!



Stopping Junk Mail

From Jeff in Seattle:

I've been noticing the high volume of postal junk mail that arrives in my mailbox. Most of my mail is actually junk mail. A couple weeks ago, I gathered all my mail out of the recycling bin and contacted all the marketers to remove myself from their mailing lists. As I was doing this, I found my REI dividend in the pile of junk mail! I had actually thrown it away thinking it was junk mail! I discovered a few great services that help me remove myself from postal junk mail lists.

Catalog Choice has a large database of companies that send junk mail. It's very easy to generate removal requests from their website to marketers. It lets me send requests using multiple names too. I send removal requests for myself, previous residents, and a nearby neighbor who sometimes forgets to put 'W' on her address (which then makes it my address). The website is: <https://www.catalogchoice.org>

DMA Choice is a website run by the Direct Marketing Association (DMA). Founded in 1917, the DMA represents nearly 3,600 organizations—including most of the leaders in the direct marketing community. The DMA has a do not contact list. You can add yourself to the do not contact list by registering at the DMA Choice website. The website is: <https://www.dmachoice.org>

OptOutPrescreen will remove you from postal mailing lists for firm offers of credit and insurance. I was told by a mortgage broker that opting out of credit offers can actually improve your credit score. The website is: <https://www.optoutprescreen.com> It feels good to make this small effort that has an impact every time one of the junk mailers sends marketing material...one less junk mail sent.

From Karuna in Seattle:

Jeff's email got me thinking more about junk mail so my ears perked up when I heard someone talking about Paper Karma. Paper Karma is an app for iPhones and Androids. You take a picture of unwanted mail and they unsubscribe you. I've unsubscribed from 13 companies in the two weeks I've had the app. www.paperkarma.com