

ORGANIC GARDENING AND THE SOIL GROWER

ORGANIC GARDENING : AN OVERVIEW

Organic gardening involves using natural products and byproducts to grow plants and enrich soils. In its most basic form, organic gardening is helping Mother Nature's natural process of transferring energy from dying or dead organisms to new living organisms. Decomposing plant and animal life enriches the soil and allows plants to use the newly available nutrient to grow and thrive. This decomposition also increases what is known as the soil's microbial life, which works in a symbiotic relationship with the plant and its root structure to uptake and access nutrients more rapidly.

There are two items every organic gardener must know about organic fertilizers. The first is the fertilizer's N-P-K (or nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium) rating, the three numbers listed most prominently on the bag or bottle. Nitrogen promotes leafy growth, phosphorus encourages fruiting and rooting, and potassium promotes fruiting and flowering. These are macronutrients essential to all plant life. The methods for applying these nutrients vary, the two most prominent being "top-dressing" and making "teas." Top dressing is adding the fertilizer to the top inch or two of soil around the root zone and scratching or mixing it in so that it does not run-off. Making a tea consists of mixing a few tablespoons of dry fertilizer into 5 gallons of water and oxygenating it for 24 hours using a small air pump or similar device. This method allows for substantial increases in microbial life and dilutes the fertilizer so that it can be used while watering or as a foliar spray.

Microbial life is comprised of small organisms that benefit plants. These microbes (e.g. mycorrhizae, like Plant Success and Rooters) adhere to the root structures and help plants break down organic matter. By increasing the microbial life in "dead" soil, plants will be able to access more nutrients. This will help houseplants, as well as outdoor gardens. People who use chemical fertilizers kill a lot of the microbial life in their soil, and repel worms. The addition of mycorrhizae, or other microbial life found in worm castings and other organic fertilizers, is always a necessity for lush garden growth



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