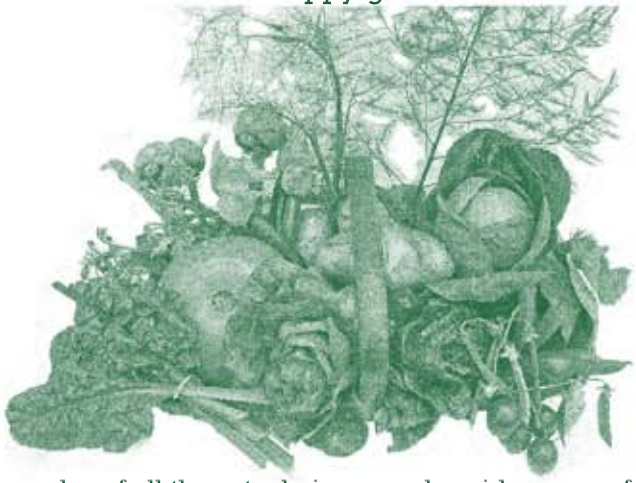
## PREVENT PROBLEMS

Pests and diseases will still occur, especially while an organic garden is being established – it can't be created overnight. Even in well-established gardens, we need to use a range of techniques to foil pests. The secret is to know the "enemy" and to take steps to disrupt its lifestyle. Several methods are used by organic gardeners: creating barriers to keep pests away; using biological controls; growing disease resistant varieties; and being vigilant. It is very important to stress that healthy plants are less likely to invite problems. This is achieved by providing good growing conditions and whatever nutrients a plant needs, so it is crucial to understand your plants and grow species and varieties that are suited to your local conditions. It is obvious that too few nutrients can be a problem but it is also vital that plants should not be overfed as this will result in sappy growth which is sure to attract pests.



To see examples of all these techniques and a wide range of organically grown plants visit

**the ASK Organic Garden**

a half acre garden within Woodside Walled Garden, situated 4 miles north of Jedburgh, east of the A68 on the B6400.
The ASK Organic Garden is open 7 days a week March to October 10am to 5pm. Someone from ASK is usually on hand to answer questions on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays between 11am and 4pm.

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# HOME GROWN:

## *the organic way*

# What is Organic Gardening?

**More and more folk would like to learn to garden organically. They recognise how important this approach is for the environment and that it produces safe and tasty food but are afraid their garden will succumb to a fearsome onslaught of weeds, pests and diseases. Not so! This leaflet will outline some of the main ideas that underpin organic gardening, including getting soil ready and choosing seed.**

LOTTERY FUNDED

The ASK Organic Garden Club

You grow healthy plants organically by:
Looking after the soil
Having a natural balance of pests and predators
Using organic techniques and vigilance to prevent problems

## LOOKING AFTER THE SOIL

The soil is the most important part of any garden. When it is in good heart, healthy plants will look after themselves and resist many of the garden's pests and diseases.

What kind of soil do you have? Test how alkaline it is, remembering that most vegetables [except potatoes] like soil that has a pH reading of 6.5 – 7. You may need to alter the pH level by adding lime. This is done in the autumn before planting as the lime and compost will neutralise each other.

What is its structure? Is it thin and gritty, largely clay or a good light loam? Soil particles and air should be 50:50, so if your soil is not like that you'll need to add compost or leafmould to ensure good structure; if dense, compost and green manures will be needed to break it up. [Green manures, like Grazing Rye, are sown in the autumn.]

We add home made compost to the soil, either well rotted and dug in during the spring, or rougher and used as a top dressing. Well rotted compost should be dug in, at the rate of one barrowload per $10^2$metres. Do not be tempted to add more than that as you can make the soil too rich. This will encourage leafy growth. Rough compost can be put in a potato trench or it can be used as a top dressing, especially round brassica plants. Worms will gradually incorporate the compost into the soil, providing a steady source of nutrients for the growing plants.

When growing vegetables we use a 4 year rotation system. Different crops need different soil treatment: potatoes and brassicas need to grow in rich soil, roots don't. Peas add nitrogen, brassicas enjoy a good mulch, earthing up potatoes improves soil structure. Each crop attracts its own pests and diseases, so this rotation prevents a build up of these problems.

For early crops, warm the soil first. Dig the soil over, adding compost where necessary, and rake it smooth. Use clear plastic or enviromesh. Build a frame, use a cloche or lay the fabric on twigs, to keep it off the ground. You need to do this to let the soil dry out a bit. Do this for 2/3 weeks before sowing or planting. You'll find the first weeds germinating, so hoe them off before putting your own crops in.

By following these guidelines the structure of your soil will steadily improve as the billions of micro organisms work to your advantage.

## A NATURAL BALANCE

A well established organic garden will have a good balance of what we call "pests" and "predators". All these living creatures, including those too small for us to see, will find a balance. Every pest provides a delicious dinner for one or more predators, and no self respecting predator will empty its larder at one sitting. In other words, we must tolerate some pests, but they'll rarely be in large enough numbers to cause problems.

The organic gardener provides conditions that will attract beneficial predators into the garden.

- Provide shelter and nesting places for birds
- Provide tangly growth and shelter for insects and beetles
- Grow flowers that provide nectar for beneficial insects
- Have a pond for frogs, toads, insects and to provide water for birds
- Make hibernation shelters with a pile of rotting logs or a drystane dyke

Watch what the wildlife in your garden is doing, that way you will discover which creatures are helping your gardening efforts and which are not.

## TARGET YOUR EFFORTS

Think carefully about which plants will be happy in your garden and how much work you want to give yourself to manipulate the conditions you have. If you have a very alkaline soil is it worth lowering the pH to grow blueberries or if you garden on acid sand do you want to add that much muck to make it suitable for cauliflowers.

Choose species and varieties suited to your conditions, catalogues usually specify varieties that can cope with drier soil or partial shade.

Learn which pests and diseases are present in your garden and select resistant varieties; again catalogues give information about disease resistance. If you have serious, soil-borne diseases like onion white rot or club root, consider growing susceptible species in containers which you can fill with clean soil.