

Amazing Soil...

Garden Organically

Gardening is fun!

Gardening is a fun activity that you can do to produce great tasting fruits and vegetables you and your family can enjoy. Plants need nutrients just like you so they can grow. These nutrients—nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium—can come from fertilizer made by man or they can come from other sources like manure or compost. Gardeners also have to deal with pests—weeds, insects and diseases. Gardeners can use chemical pesticides to control these pests, but some choose nonchemical options (pulling weeds, spraying insects with soap and choosing plant varieties that resist diseases). Gardening without man-made fertilizers and pesticides is commonly called organic gardening.

Organic gardening uses cover crops and green manure crops to build up organic matter (decayed plant and animal matter) that makes soil dark and easy to work. Soil is alive, and more organic matter makes for a healthier soil. You can test your soil to see how fertile it is.

Things you can do to garden organically:

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Fertilizing: use manure or compost

Weeds: pull by hand, mulch around plants

Insects: pick off by hand, attract beneficial insects by planting edges of the garden with clover

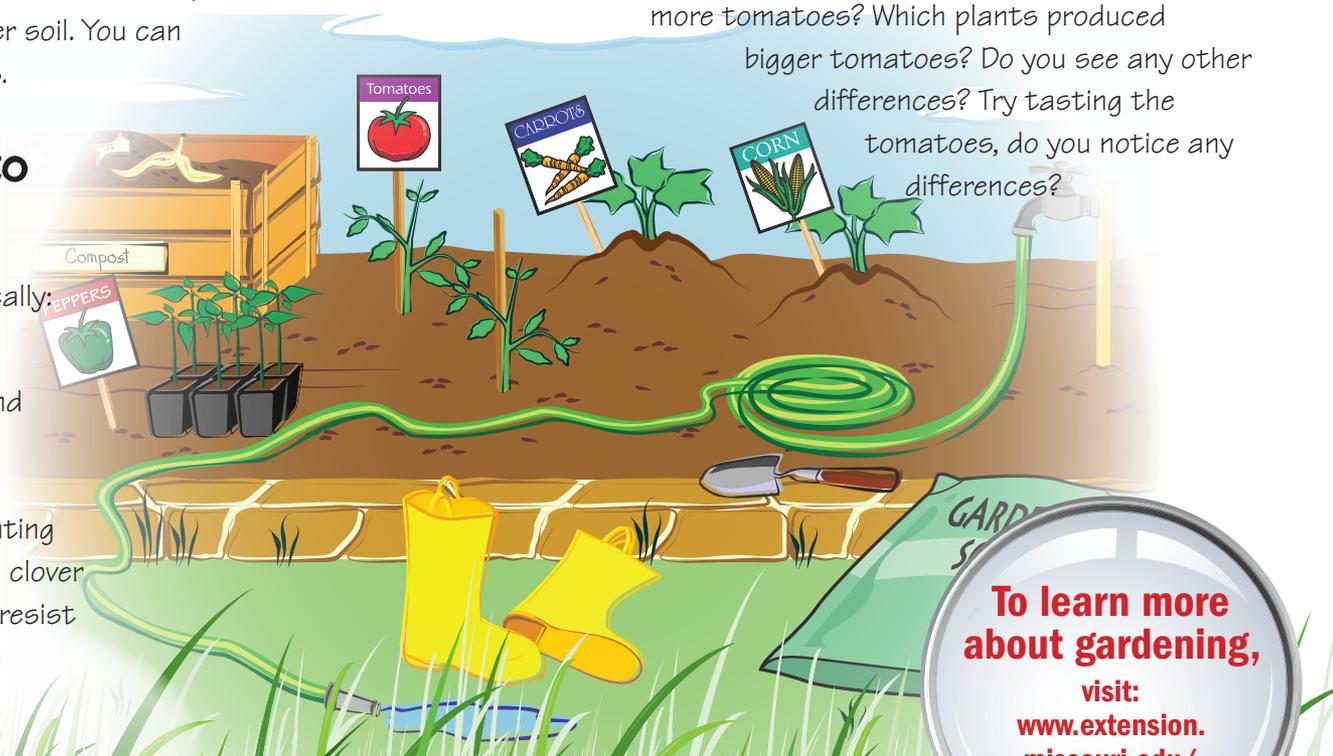
Diseases: use plant varieties that resist disease, rotate crops

Fun facts about organic gardening:

-  Plants don't care where nutrients come from—they just need the nutrients
-  Before man-made fertilizers and chemical pesticides, all crops and gardens were organic
-  Organic matter (decayed plants and animals, which make soil dark) increases crop yields about 12 percent for every increase in organic matter of 1 percent.

Fun to do:

You can compare different organic gardening methods in your garden. Plant some tomatoes in your garden in May. Fertilize some plants with compost. Fertilize other plants with commercial fertilizer. Make measurements of plants before and after fertilizing. You can also weigh the tomatoes you harvest. Which plants grew faster? Which plants produced more tomatoes? Which plants produced bigger tomatoes? Do you see any other differences? Try tasting the tomatoes, do you notice any differences?



To learn more about gardening, visit: www.extension.missouri.edu/lawn-garden

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