



HAVE SPADE, WILL TRAVEL
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THE ORGANIC PRINCIPAL

Our fundamental philosophy is the maintenance of our environment by methods that build and bolster life rather than choosing methods that deplete and hinder. We take the approach that there is always a natural way to approach every issue regarding the care and maintenance of yards and gardens. This is not a new or radical approach, but goes back sixty plus years to before the invention and addition to mainstream culture the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. These methods are sound; Tried and true. Sustainable is the new 'buzz' word, sometimes being offered instead of natural or organic. Whichever terminology you choose to adopt, the principle can be broken down into three main concepts (as borrowed from Howard Garret):

- Omission of toxic pesticides
- Omission of synthetic fertilizers.
- Use techniques and products that build and maintain soil life.

Sustainability, in a general sense, is the capacity to maintain a certain process or state indefinitely.

I have often used the term 'chemical' to describe fertilizers, fungicides, and pesticides. Recently I was corrected by a scientist who reminded me that everything is made up of chemicals, so I have changed my vernacular to 'synthetic'. The use, even just occasionally, let alone on a regular basis of synthetics in our landscape can create very unsafe environment for us, our families and pets. Unlike organic garden products, synthetic products used in the home and garden have been proven to cause cancer and many other illnesses in people and pets. Landscapes that utilize the organic concept require less time and material to maintain. They use far less water, and

become naturally resistant to disease and insect problems. Flower gardens become lush, and more floriferous. Lawns are thicker and greener. Fruit and vegetable gardens produce higher yields with increases in quality and nutritional value.

It is all about the life in the soil. In a healthy teaspoon of soil there can easily be a billion microbes. These little guys break down stuff, usually organic material, and process it into a form that can be taken up by all plants. Most synthetic fertilizers don't feed the microbes what they want, so no more than twenty percent of a synthetic actually makes it to the plant...the rest goes off to pollute waterways. Organic fertilizers are utilized one hundred percent by the microbes, more bang for your buck! The single best thing we can do for our microbes is to give them compost. Compost is raw organic materials mixed with manures and broken down to a point where they unidentifiable. As little as a quarter inch spread over a lawn can cut water usage by as much as twenty percent! The more you want out of an area, the more compost you should use; One to two inches in a flower bed each season, two to six inches worked into the soil of your veggie garden between crops.

As good as compost is for feeding the microbes and encouraging their activity which helps to loosen the soil, we still need to feed. You will find that the longer you are involved in the organic process the less fertilizer you will use. I compare compost to the best salad bar on the planet, as food for the microbes, but a good balanced fertilizer is steak! We fertilize three times a year, maybe. Fall is the most important, spring is the follow up and the optional summer application is just to make the neighbors jealous.



www.Texas-Heirloom-Tomatoes.com 20+ Growing Tips

- Step up your transplants in to 1 gallon nursery pots. Half gallon milk cartons, with drain holes added, work well. Hold these in a greenhouse or carry indoors until weather conditions are appropriate for planting.
- Tomato plants will only flower when grown in full sun. The more sun the plant can get, the more fruit you can get. Jerry Parsons says "If there is a tree on the horizon, it's too close."
- Work LOTS of compost in to the planting area. I use about a wheelbarrow full per plant, half mixed in, the other half as mulch.
- Add a cup of soft rock phosphate to the bottom of each hole. Set the bottom of the root ball directly into this material. This is the single most important amendment you can offer your new plants.
- Add mycorrhizal inoculants. These beneficial fungi will greatly enhance a plants ability to absorb water and nutrients.
- Set your plants at LEAST 3 feet apart. Tomatoes are susceptible to mildew problems if they don't receive good air flow; think roses.
- Set your plants 'green side up'.
- Set your new plants deep. Pick off lower leaves and set so that only two sets of leaves and about an inch or two of stem are showing.

-Mix in a couple cups of corn meal with the backfill soil to help prevent fungal diseases. (A very inexpensive and effective treatment) Nix on the mixing... instead, sprinkle a few handfuls around the base of each plant on the soils surface.

-Look in to 'rock powders'; greensand, lava sand, basalt and granite, added to your garden soil, these provide long term stores of trace minerals making for stronger and healthier plants.

-DON'T over-water. This is the single most frequent mistake made. An established tomato plant will perform at its best when watered DEEPLY every ten days or so. You cannot give a plant too much water, but you can do it too often.

-Use ground cedar mulch on top of your compost to help deter root rot nematodes. I also like alfalfa hay as mulch. I like the golden color it turns, the earthy smell, and all the nitrogen it adds!

-Foliar feed regularly, about every two weeks. There are many recipes for foliar sprays and all have merit. Seaweed extract and molasses are probably the two most import ingredients to look for. This practice will eliminate 99% of spider mites and do a great deal to bolster overall plant health.

-Use a 'tea' of corn meal; soak half a cup in a gallon of tap water overnight; strain. Spray after long rainy periods to ward off or control powdery mildew and many other diseases. Works like magic!

-A Bacillus thuringiensis product if necessary to control hornworms. Spray only the plant with an apparent problem. Hornworms usually twitch violently when sprayed with water. If you notice a damaged plant, spray it down (in early morning) and watch for the 'dancing worm'. These are easily picked and discarded by hand.

-Cage up, trellis, or string guide indeterminate tomato varieties. This will give much needed support, and aid in fruit production. I would be disappointed if my plants didn't grow to at least 15" length each year.

-Seriously consider the use of grow web fabric, if you don't already. There are way too many benefits to list here.

-Grow several tomato varieties; you can never tell which will excel from one year to the next with our typically inconsistent weather.

-I like to plant a few bush beans at the foot, on the western facing side, of my tomatoes. All legumes add nitrogen to the soil. I will also grow snow peas and bluebonnets in my tomato beds as winter crops.

-Keep an accurate garden journal. You will be amazed how often you will refer back to this useful little tool. Include planting dates, plant variety names and sources, soil amendments, etc...

-Dig up more sod and make room for more tomatoes!



My friend Charles T. and Spike (the one with the hair) and a two month old plant by following these tips. His only question was "How do you turn these things off?"