

Organic Gardening

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Course Overview

This 6-week online course is intended to examine the basics of small-scale organic gardening. The topics and depth of information offered will help new gardeners learn the basics and feel comfortable getting started, while also offer more experienced gardeners the opportunity to expand their knowledge base. *This course may not be ideal for very experienced organic gardeners.* Additionally, students will walk away with a wealth of resources to look into for further study. You will also have the opportunity to learn from one another through an open forum in which you can share your ideas with others.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you will:

- Have a clear grasp of organic gardening techniques and methods
- Have begun to develop an ecological approach to gardening that includes soil health, water, nutrients and weeds.
- Become familiar with your garden site's resources and challenges. Have the opportunity to develop realistic garden design.
- Feel comfortable applying organic gardening techniques in your own garden.
- Be familiar with the numerous resources available as you develop your interest and skill with organic gardening. *Note: This is not an organic farming course. The content taught in this course is applicable to small-scale sites, such as a backyard.*

Course Philosophy

This course is taught with a systems-thinking approach. Many elements contribute to the health and productivity of a garden and furthermore, a garden is one element of a backyard/landscape. As such, we hope to engage participants in learning a broad and foundational perspective about organic gardening. We believe this will guide you towards being able to design a garden for the long-term so the garden meets your goals; so it is not an overwhelming amount of work, and so that it becomes less work overtime; and so that it is productive and beautiful.

Our Approach

This course will present a wide range of information including the background of organic gardening as well as organic gardening versus conventional gardening, ecology, landscape design, general technique, and methods for applying the content to your daily life. Participants will read assigned essays and book excerpts, participate in online group discussions with other students, complete reflective writing/design work and take part in some hands-on activities. The class is designed to keep a pace of one topic each week. Most students spend approximately 5 hours/week with the content, though there are always ample resources and opportunity to do more.

Philosophy of the Instructor:

This is an on-line course that you are likely taking for your own personal enrichment and proficiency. As such, I hope that you are intrinsically motivated to complete readings and all assignments, including optional assignments, to devote considerable time to coursework, and to communicate with your colleagues freely and often in an effort to get the most from this course. I will assign readings, and I will assume you read them; I will not "test" you on content because I do not believe that should be your motivation. You will get from the course what you put into it.

Our communication will be positive and will focus on course content. Rude or offensive language, and overly critical commentary will not be tolerated. It is a course taken for enrichment, and the way we communicate with one another will be constructive.

Please be open with your feedback and feel free to contact me with any questions. Open dialogue is encouraged.

Expectations

Though the class is not "live," participants are expected to keep up with the weekly assignments and discussions. Ideally, you are able to spend some hours of the course (especially during the 2nd week), in your garden space or at least observing your garden. Because the topic each week is a part of the whole approach to organic gardening, skipping a topic one week may cause you some confusion.

No previous experience in the natural sciences, ecology, landscape design, farming, gardening or other subject area is required.

Experience in these areas is certainly helpful, but this course will cover a basic to an intermediate level of each topic. Generally, with online or autonomous learning situations, you will get out of it as much as you put into it.

If complex and emotional issues in discussion groups arise, please be sensitive and supportive of other classmates. Please notify the instructors if there is a concern that we have failed to notice or sufficiently address.

The class will officially begin on March 19 with March 12-18 as an introductory week to get familiar with the Moodle interface. There will be a mid-course break from April 9-15. The class will close on May 7; you will not be able to access the material after May 21.

Course Schedule and Format

March 12- 18: Introduction Days- Welcome and Introductions

March 19-25: Week 1: Introduction- What is Organic Gardening? Knowing your site.

March 26-April 1: Week 2- Soil, Compost and Mulch

April 2-8: Week 3- Vegetables and Flowers: Site Design and Planning for the Season

April 9-15: Spring Break

April 16-22: Week 4- Vegetables and Flowers: Early, Mid, Late Season Crops; Harvesting, Herbs

April 23-29: Week 5- Maintenance and Managing Pests

April 30-May 6: Week 6- Trees, Shrubs and Herbaceous Perennials: The Long-Term Landscape

Lessons

Each week's lesson will contain a combination of the following components:

- Selected readings about the topic of the week
- Activities to carry out at home; some with deliverables to share with the instructor or fellow participants
- Reflective writing to allow you to develop a thoughtful perspective and a dialogue with instructors
- Discussion forum questions and topics for discussion
- Optional additional readings, activities and resources

It is important that you work through each lesson assigned for a particular week. Please complete and submit to the course instructor the required assignments before the stated deadline (generally **midnight** each Sunday). Late assignments will be accepted but instructor feedback may be delayed and your satisfactory completion of the course compromised. Consider optional activities only after completing and submitting required assignments.

Reflective Writing

Your reflective writing will allow you to have some time to sit with and ponder the information you are learning, and to develop a thoughtful perspective on how to apply it to your gardening approach. It also creates an opportunity for a dialogue with the course instructor. Reflection is something that you can do at home, at work, or during a stroll through your garden. It will encourage you to make more connections between learning in the course and your life experience.

Required Readings/Books

We will be using the *Site Assessment* by Charles P. Mazza. This booklet can be purchased for about \$20 online from [PALS Cooperative Extension](#).

Supplies

- A computer with reliable high speed Internet access (to view videos, view readings, submit assignments, and participate regularly in discussion forums).
- A garden space you've worked in or hoping to work in this season
- You may want to start a binder for assignments, handouts and other resources
- Optional: A device for scanning the garden design you create and submitting them as pdf file.