

## **Organic Gardening**

Instructor: Fiona Doherty, fcd9@cornell.edu

### **Purpose**

This 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.

### **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.
  - Be more familiar with your garden site's resources and challenges and will have the opportunity to develop a 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 view recorded presentations, 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 3-4 hours/week with the content, though there are always ample resources and opportunity to do more.

**About the Instructor:** The instructor, Fiona Doherty, has been in the field of garden education for over five years. She has worked with diverse audiences in many types of settings including community gardens, school gardens and both urban and rural farms domestically and internationally. She is passionate about empowering others to grow and eat their own healthful foods.

The instructor will be timely in posting material for each week of the course, will be responsive when questions are asked, and provide constructive feedback on assignments.

**Expectations:** Though the class is not “live”, participants are expected to keep up with the weekly assignments and discussions.

As this is an online course, your own self- motivation to complete assignments, ask questions, and participate in community dialogues/online discussions around the topics being presented is essential. Ideally, you are able to spend some hours of the course (especially during the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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. Rude or offensive language, and overly critical commentary is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Please notify the instructors if there is a concern that we have failed to notice or sufficiently address.

## **Lessons**

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

- Presentation of the core material
- 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**

Shared once you register for the course

### **Supplies**

- A computer with reliable high speed Internet access (to view videos, view readings, submit assignments, and participate regularly in discussion forums). (
- Ideally, 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).