



Sustainable Gardening Guidelines

Sustainable Gardening is a process that promotes and enhances biodiversity, natural biological cycles, and soil health that in turn restores, maintains, and enhances overall ecological and human health. If sustainable gardening had a motto, it would be: *Feed the soil, not the plant!*

Compost: Compost is decomposed organic materials and is a rich soil amendment. Mix well-composted organic material into your plot to boost soil fertility, add good micro- and macro-organisms, and improve soil water retention.

Fertilizers: Fertilizers are substances that contain one or more recognized plant nutrient that is used in promoting plant growth. Gardeners are strongly encouraged to add organic material rather than fertilizers, i.e. compost, aged herbivore manure, leaf mold, and fish emulsion. Synthetic fertilizers are prohibited (**no ammonia, urea, Miracle Gro etc**). Look for “USDA Organic” label when choosing a fertilizer.

Insect & Disease Control: *Use of synthetic insecticides and fungicides is prohibited.* Healthy plants and healthy soil in combination with companion planting and hand picking of pests are the best practices. If resorting to a plant-based or “USDA Organic” insecticide (i.e. pyrethrum), make sure to follow directions carefully and take precautions. Many products can still be highly toxic to you, beneficial insects, or some plants. Check in with a Garden or Farm Manager before applying insecticides or fungicides.

To prevent the spread of disease and pests, do not put diseased or pest-ridden plants in the compost bin. These plants should be thrown away and removed from the garden.

Mulch: Non-synthetic materials such as straw and leaves can be used as mulch to suppress weed growth, moderate soil temperature, conserve soil moisture, and improve soil structure as they breakdown. Woodchips are used as pathway mulch at some gardens, but should not be used within the plots.

Crop Rotation and Crop Diversity: Crop rotation is strongly recommended even in a small garden setting. Growing the same crops in the same spot year after year can promote pest, diseases and weeds in the soil. Plant a diverse garden and avoid growing the same crop in the same space year after year.

Cover Crops: Cover crops or “green manure” are a great way to improve soil health and productivity. Cover crops can be grown with vegetables or in a spot not currently in-use. Like mulches, cover crop residue can be left on the surface and/or tilled in to add nutrients to the soil. When incorporated into annual garden rotations, cover crops provide added benefits of suppressing weeds, preventing erosion, conserving moisture, increasing biodiversity, and attracting beneficial insects. Some examples of cover crops are clover, hairy vetch, peas and buckwheat. Make sure to research cover crops before introducing a potentially pesky weed into your garden. *Don't let cover crops go to seed!*

Additional Gardening Resources: Find more information in the tool shed and on our website, <http://www.gardencityharvest.org/programs/community-gardens>