KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening, Get Good At It

“Organic Weed & Insect Control”

June 4, 2019

Organic gardening has become popular for home gardeners. Many people want to know that their families are eating chemical-free fruits and vegetables. They also want to do their best to protect pollinators such as honey bees. Today we’ll talk about how home gardeners can grow organically and still control pests in their gardens.

Providing your plants with the growing conditions that they need to flourish will make them stronger and less susceptible to garden pests. Before you plant, make sure your soil is ready. Work weed-free organic compost into the soil at a rate of 1.5 to 2 pounds per 100 square feet of garden space. Organic matter helps our naturally sandy, volcanic soil retain nutrients and water. You can create your own organic compost by saving your organic fruit and vegetable scraps to be decomposed in your compost pile. You can also purchase organic compost at local gardening centers.

Be sure you have all the right conditions in place to grow the types of plants you want to grow. You can find plenty of information on the seed packet including how deep to plant your seeds and how much room they need. Because of our very short growing season and cold night time temperatures which slow growth, look on the seed packet to find plants that will mature between 55 and 70 days. You also want to be sure your garden site has at least eight hours of full sunlight and a dependable, easy source of water for irrigation.

Weeds compete with garden plants for water and nutrients and should be removed as quickly as possible in order to make it easier for your plants to obtain what they need from the soil. Once you’ve removed weeds, a 3” layer of mulch will help keep your garden weed-free and reduce evaporation of water from the soil. The most common organic mulches used in the Pacific Northwest include bark products, yard waste compost, wood chips (arborist mulch), mint hay, and deciduous tree leaves. Organic mulches can be purchased at local garden centers. Weed cloth, plastic or cardboard can also be used to minimize weeds.

Finally, insect pests may need to be controlled in your organic garden. Avoid planting pest-prone plants and rotate crops to discourage infestations. Provide a physical barrier to your young plants by covering them with floating row cover until flowers appear and then removing it to allow pollinators access to your plants. Encourage pollinators and friendly insects by planting native plants and flowering plants. Bees love sunflowers, clover, asters, lavender, oregano and catnip.

Insect pests can be removed by hand and collected in a bowl of soapy water. Aphids and spider mites can be removed with a sharp blast of water from a garden hose. Removing dead leaves, fallen fruit and other debris that provide refuge for pests will help prevent infestations. If you’re unable to control an insect pest, be sure to remove the infested plant from your garden and don’t add it to your compost pile.

When all else fails, organic insecticides and repellants may be purchased at your local garden center, but as with any other pesticide, read the label carefully before using and follow all label directions.

Organic Weed and Insect Control is a free class that will be taught by a Central Oregon Master Gardener at Hollinshead Community Garden on Saturday, June 8th at 10 am.

For more information on this or any other gardening topic, call the Master Gardeners at 541-548-6088 or go to our website [gocomga.com](http://gocomga.com/) and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at it on KPOV, The Point.

Resources:

Here are links to sites with more information organic weed and insect control:

“Growing Vegetables in Central Oregon: Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson Counties”; OSU Extension Publication EM 9128; November 2015. <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9128>

“Fertilizing Your Garden: Vegetables, Fruits and Ornamentals”; OSU Extension Publication EC 1503; April 2000. <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1503>

“A Pocket Guide to Common and Natural Enemies of Crop and Garden Pests in the Pacific Northwest”; OSU Extension Publication EC 1613; December 2007; <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1613>

“Encouraging Beneficial Insects in Your Garden”; OSU Extension Publication PNW 550; July 2001: <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/search/content/PNW%20550>

“Living on the Land: Providing Habitat for Native Pollinators”; OSU Extension Publication EC 1649; January 2017. <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1649>

“Mulching Woody Ornamentals with Organic Mulch”; OSU Extension Publication EC1629; March 2009.  <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1629>

“Manage Wildlife Conflicts in Your Home and Garden” OSU Extension Publication PNW 719; March 2019: <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/pnw719>