



Organic 101

What is organic landscaping?

Organic is not a swapping out of synthetic products for natural ones. It is a science-based, proven method of managing landscapes that does not rely on toxic pesticides, with a primary focus on soil health. Resilient soil has a living community of organisms teeming with bacteria, fungi, and more. This is called the biomass.

As defined by the Organic Landscape Association (OLA), organic landscaping is inclusive of both lawn care and plant maintenance. Organic landscaping is the creation and maintenance of naturally sustaining systems whereby soil and plant nutrition and plant health are the byproducts of a chemical free management program based on a systems approach.

This systems approach is based on three concepts:

- 1) Use of a Natural product where use is governed by soil testing and site considerations
- 2) Acknowledgment that the soil biomass plays a critical role in fertility
- 3) Specific and sound horticultural practices.

The basic principles of organic landscaping are principles of health, ecology, and care. Organic landscaping should operate from a position of precaution.

How does it work?

Organic landscaping focuses not only on system health but also the long-term health of the environment and the elimination of synthetic exposures to people.

The basis for success in organic landscaping and land care is a knowledge of soils - particularly the biological life.

Organic landscaping should be focused on continuing to improve soil health. A systems-based approach

focuses on soils and soil health, sound horticultural practices, and the use of natural, organic products when indicated or necessary.

Organic landscaping strives to:

- Protect biological and ecological diversity
- Enhance the microbial populations in soils
- Build resiliency and sustainability in landscapes and ecosystems
- Avoid excess product applications for fertility
- Encourage the landscape system to function on its own over time
- Encourage basic practices that enhance the soil and plant system
- Embrace the concept that landscape management is site-specific
- Move towards the goal of minimal input to the managed landscape
- Have all inputs for fertilizer and soil amendments be natural or organic in nature
- Make sure that the right plant material is used in every location
- Encourage the use of native plant material within individual regions

When will we see results?

When a natural management program is being put in place after conventional management, a window of time, referred to as the transition period, is typically required to make practice and input changes.

The most important element in beginning systems-based management is the attention to the soil, not just texture and chemistry, but the biomass as well. Success is achieved by focusing on the living portion of the soil from the beginning of a natural program. The length of time required for this process is directly related to the intensity of conventional management practices that are currently employed.

What is the goal?

The goal of a natural, organic landscape management program is to create plants that meet aesthetic site objectives while eliminating toxic and synthetic chemical inputs. Additionally, the products and programs are designed to utilize materials and adopt cultural practices that will avoid problems associated with runoff or leaching of nutrients and pest control products into water bodies and groundwater.

This approach will build a soil environment rich in microbiology that produces strong, healthy plants that are more resilient and better able to withstand many of the stresses that can affect them. If good cultural practices are adopted, and products are chosen to enhance and continually address the soil biology, the natural system is better able to withstand pressures from insects, weeds, and disease, as well as drought and heat stress. While problems can arise in any landscape system, they will be easier to alleviate when the soil is healthy with the proper microbiology in place.

