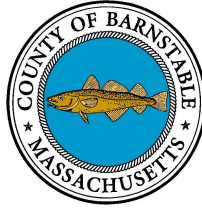




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Environmentally Sound Gardening Tips

Everything that you do in your garden can influence the environment. Be a sound gardener by following these tips:

Incorporate organic matter in the soil every year

Organic matter conditions the soil. It aids in holding water, holding nutrients and encourages life underground (micro-organisms and earth worms). Organic matter sources include farm manures, compost, seaweed, peat moss, leaves, grass clippings, etc.

Use mulch

Mulch conserves moisture, controls weeds, keeps fruit and vegetables clean, provides a nice pathway for the gardener and can be tilled under (if organic).

Have the soil tested every 2-3 years

Soil testing provides you with the information to make wise gardening decisions regarding fertilizers, lime and organic matter.

Do not over work the soil

Over cultivation can destroy soil structure. Do not work wet or frozen soil. Raised bed gardens can be a method for early gardens if wet soil is a problem.

Maintain a proper soil pH

Improper soil pH can "lock up" nutrients. Aim for a pH of 6.5 - 7.0.

Use soaker hoses or drip irrigation

Water only those plants that need it. Overhead sprinklers tend to waste water, wet the leaves and cause disease problems.

Keep soil covered in every season

The soil is a precious resource. Prevent soil erosion with crops, winter cover crops or mulch in the spring, summer, fall and winter.

Plant on the contour

Don't allow water to take away the topsoil. Plant across the incline to catch any soil that moves downhill. Plant vegetative buffer strips to capture excessive nutrients and eroding soil.

Use pesticides only when needed

Identify the pest that's bugging your plants. Make a wise decision on timing, prevention and control. Ask for advice if needed.

Choose the least toxic control for the target pest

All pesticides are poisons (organic and synthetic). Select the pesticide that is meant for the pest and the plant you are trying to protect. Read the label before purchasing or using the product.

Avoid over-use of fertilizer

Too much fertilizer means pollution of the environment. Apply only those nutrients in the right amounts and at the best time for good garden yields.

Compost to recycle nutrients

Composting is a great gardening practice that will recycle nutrients and benefit the soil. Composting also reduces the waste stream.

Select crops / plants for your area

Use those plants that are suited for your specific area (hardiness zone and season length). Know what those plants need for growth, productivity and survival.

Use plants that naturally repel pests

Find out what pests are common for the crops you are growing. Use trap crops and companion plants to help keep pest populations low.

From UMass Extension's Agriculture and Landscape Program newsletter, *Garden Clippings*
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