



# ORGANIC GARDENING ESSENTIALS

## Gardeners Embrace Organic Methods to Grow their Food

By Jillian Ross

**V**EGETABLE GARDENING—with its edible rewards—has emerged as America’s #1 hobby. Thanks to the pioneering efforts of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello, it’s almost considered a patriotic endeavor. Dedicated gardeners are a hardy crop and are willing to encourage and share knowledge with new gardeners. The benefits are obvious—after all, we are what we eat! With concern burgeoning about exactly what is in our food, where it comes from and how it has been produced and handled, home gardens are becoming an essential life-

style addition for many families. It’s a simultaneous delight and comfort when you can step out your back door to pick your dinner salad.

Now more than ever, gardeners are embracing organic methods to grow their food. To enjoy a productive harvest, though, requires a basic understanding of your garden and its requirements. At this point, many would-be gardeners groan inwardly and give up. The dream of enjoying home-grown fruits and vegetables can drown in the frustration of sifting through endless sources of often-contradictory advice and overly-generalized information.



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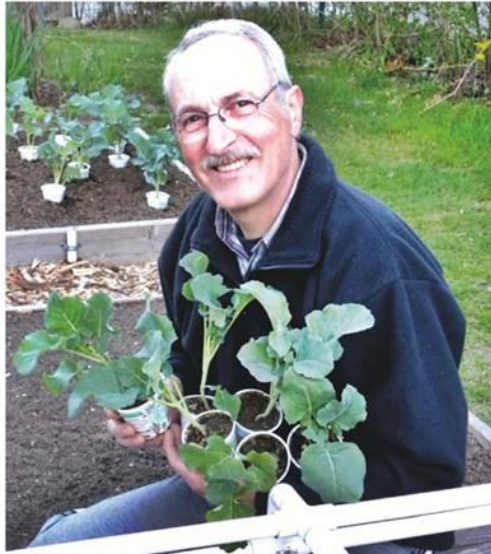
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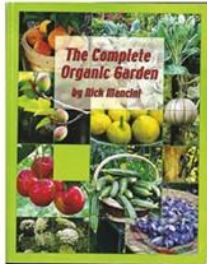


Photos contributed and by Nick Mancini

**Above: Nick Mancini, a local organic gardener tends his own garden.**

**Below: The cover of his book, "The Complete Organic Garden."**

Location, soil preparation, seed propagation, designing raised beds, insect and disease control, support and staking, harvesting...all these are important considerations for gardening success. While longtime gardeners seem to know



these things instinctively, new gardeners often despair when confronted with such a long list of requirements.

Do not despair—that problem has been solved for us by Nick Mancini, a local organic gardener who tends his own beautiful gardens and enjoys bountiful harvests. Born in a small village in Italy and

nurtured by his gardening grandfather, Nick is instilled with the essence of organic gardening. He is a certified Connecticut Master Gardener whose passion and decades of experience will guide you through the conception, creation, maintenance and rewards of a garden of your very own.

Nick Mancini's recently-released book, *The Complete Organic Garden*, is a 408-page reference book complete with hundreds of photographs and illustrations explaining essential principles of site placement, soil building, preservation of heirloom seeds, crop rotation, and organic controls for pests and diseases. Don't be put off by the "reference book" description—although Nick's book is a veritable A-Z encyclopedia on organic gardening, it is extremely user-friendly. The ten years that Nick invested in creating *The Complete*

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Organic Garden have resulted in detailed information in simple language enhanced by his own photographs and drawings. The bonus factor is—because Nick is a local gardener—his guidance is perfectly tuned to our local conditions.

For example, it is common knowledge that most above-ground vegetables enjoy warm, fertile accommodations. But how warm? And what exactly constitutes fertility? The Complete Organic Garden answers these questions in a straight-forward manner. Most vegetables prefer between 7 and 10 hours of full sunlight per day (minimally, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.). As Nick points out, “If light intensity declines... production is affected.” He further explains that, for maximum production, plants must “extract nutrients from the soil.” Building the optimum soil is a key component of successful organic gardening. Nick advises that the best soil is light and crumbly, about the consistency of chocolate cake! In addition to explanations, photos and illustrated instructions, Nick provides a detailed reference list detailing organic fertilizers and soil amendments. For example, AZOMITE® is a natural product mined from an ancient mineral deposit in Utah and is OMRI-Listed for certified organic production. AZOMITE contains a broad spectrum of over 70 minerals and trace elements, distinct from any mineral deposit in the world. AZOMITE® trace minerals are beneficial to root systems, plant yields and overall plant health. (Read more at <http://azomite.com/>). And this is only the first organic component Nick discusses in a list



Location, soil preparation, seed propagation, designing raised beds, are important consideration for success.

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of 37 items! Advice is also provided for specific fertilizer requirements of individual vegetables: Did you know that cucumbers require low nitrogen and high phosphorous and potassium? Too much nitrogen will result in prolific leaf growth and compromised fruit!

In addition to his Connecticut Master Gardener certification, Nick Mancini teaches at Norwalk Community College, holds lectures and seminars at the Organic Gardening Workshop in Westport, and appears at various locations to address specific gardening issues. He will discuss organic seed propagation on March 31 at the Edith Wheeler Library in Monroe; attend WellFest in Norwalk on April 1, and offer pruning advice on May 15 at the Garden Education Center of Greenwich. He also works as a garden consultant and coach. With decades of experience in growing organic vegetables, fruits, and brambles, Nick Mancini has a lot to offer. When you follow his recommendations, you are assured of a quality harvest—abundant, fresh, delicious and nutritious.

A quote from Robert Louis Stevenson on page 64 of *The Complete Organic Garden* seems to sum up Nick Mancini's organic philosophy:

*"Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you sow."*

With his book, his teaching, and by his own example, Nick Mancini is certainly sowing seeds we need now. For further information, go to <http://www.organicgardeningssimplified.com>. Or e-mail [nick@OrganicGardeningSimplified.com](mailto:nick@OrganicGardeningSimplified.com). *The Complete Organic Garden* is available from Nick directly or at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). Follow his blog, *The Organic Italian*, at <http://theorganicitalian.wordpress.com/>.

*Jillian Ross is a Master Gardener, CNLA professional and a member of the Garden Writers Association. She earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Fairfield University in 2013.*



Building the optimum soil is a key component of successful organic planting. For the best plants, the soil should be light and crumbly, about the consistency of chocolate cake, Mancini advises.

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