

ORGANIC GARDENING FOR HEALTHY SPA CUISINE

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Note: This article is intended to be a very basic overview, not a complete how-to guide.

Organic gardening isn't as complicated as it sounds and the benefits are threefold! In the simplest of terms, organic gardening does not employ the use of GMOs, synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers. Additionally, the soil is also free of chemicals and only organic seeds (or plants) are used. When these respectful techniques are applied, vegetables maintain the highest level of taste and nutrients, and they offer the cleanest, most beneficial ingredients you can include in your kitchen's recipes. If your spa already features light, healthy meals, then it only takes a few additional steps to transform your spa's dishes into sustainable organic spa cuisine. Further, by constructing a raised bed garden, you are implementing the easiest, most efficient gardening technique to produce the highest yield for the smallest space, without investing large quantities of time, energy, and money.

Because organic gardening prohibits the use of chemical pesticides, natural "pesticides" are utilized instead. In fact, these natural "pesticides" are probably already on your property: beneficial insects (ladybugs, lacewings, and the praying mantis) and birds. While beneficial insects and birds devour garden pests, they won't eat your plants. You can invite most beneficial insects by planting daisies and herbs nearby or by purchasing a "starter community" online. Birds are easy to attract—place some seed feeders within the vicinity of your garden and keep it full of black oil sunflower seed—they won't be able to resist! In addition, you can try plant variety and crop rotation. Pests are often plant specific, so to prevent them from taking up residence in your garden, plant a variety (such as tomatoes, eggplant, and cucumbers) and rotate the next year with another selection (maybe potatoes, lettuce, and peppers). Insects that have wintered over will not have a free meal the following year.

Luckily, due to its design, a raised bed doesn't require herbicides because weeds are so infrequent, but when they do appear, your hands are best for the job. Raised beds contain very loose soil, so weeds are easy to pull up—no strenuous tugging or digging required.†

Fertilizer for an organic garden must also be natural, which would include nutrient-rich kelp meal, bat guano, manure (from a farm that raises animals on hormone-, antibiotic-free, natural and/or vegetarian diets), and compost. A rolling compost bin is easiest for a busy spa because it can be placed next to the garden, it keeps a good amount of material out of the landfill, and it is discreet. Some readily available items that can be placed in a compost bin are shredded cardboard and newspaper, egg shells, small twigs, tea bags, coffee, coffee filters, and vegetable scraps. Moreover, these materials can be divided into two categories: greens and browns. Rich in nitrogen, greens comprise of vegetable scraps and coffee grounds.

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Browns, which are generally fibrous and packed with carbon, consist of twigs, egg shells, and newspaper. The ratio of greens and browns should be around 30 parts browns to 1 part greens, just enough greens to aid the decomposition process.††

Good “starter” sizes for a raised bed are 4’ x 8’ or 8’ x 16’—you can always add on to them later. For illustrative purposes, this article will describe the brief construction of a 4’ x 8’ raised bed, which takes at least two people and the following items: flat shovel, rake, black garden fabric, metal garden spikes, rubber mallet, hammer, 1-1/4” Phillips screws, Phillips screwdriver or drill, saw, 3 -2” x 10” x 8’ cedar boards, 4 raised bed corners, 60 cubic feet of organic soil or barn dirt, 1 -4 cubic feet bag of peat moss, and organic manure. Once you gather your supplies, pick a flat area and measure it into a 4’ x 8’ area, and snap a chalk outline. Remove all grass in this area with the flat shovel, making sure that the roots are gone. Next, tack down the garden fabric with the metal spikes, overlapping and cutting the fabric rolls as needed. Saw one of the 8’ boards in half, making two 4’ boards. Then, with the hammer, tap the first 8’ board into one of the corners. Once secure, drill the screws in place. Repeat until you’ve formed a box. Make sure box is placed over the fabric, and tap the end caps (which come with the corners to protect them from rust) into place with the rubber mallet. Fill with organic soil and top it with 1” to 2” layer of peat moss, raking it in. Then, add the organic manure and work it into the soil. Plant seeds or plants according to package directions and for which zone you’re located.

Once your spa has its very own organic garden, it can boast about the vitamin-packed vegetables it produces onsite, just for its clients. Adding phrases such as “specifically grown for you” or “nurturing hands and nourishing food” to your marketing material strongly addresses your spa’s mission: to provide soothing holistic services and wholesome, sustainable cuisine. Plus, by offering homegrown goodness, your spa is no longer just a spa—it’s a dual focused treatment center, dedicated to the total health and wellbeing of its clients.

† TIP: *In a larger raised bed, you can avoid packing your dirt down by using an extra board to step across it, like a bridge. This will enable you to get to the middle and harvest your vegetables without compressing the soil.*

†† TIP: *For more in-depth information concerning composting, visit HowToCompost.org.*



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