

EASY TIPS AND TRICKS FOR THE ORGANIC VEGETABLE GARDEN

By: Christine Lisiewski



As the summer heats up, the veggies we so diligently planted in the spring are really starting to jump...and so are the bunnies, beetles and borers who want to munch on the fruits of our labor! Here are a few easy ways to control the critters, prevent disease and feed your garden in a manner that is safe for kids, pets and the environment.

1. Aphids can be removed with a strong spray of water from your hose—no chemicals involved (and it's kinda fun, too).
2. Make your own insecticidal soap/repellent using one to two tablespoons of mild soap (Ivory, Dr. Bronner's), a few drops of canola oil and some cayenne pepper in a gallon of water.

3. If you have to resort to chemical controls, look for the OMRI (Organic Materials Review Institute) designation on the label. This means the product is suitable for organic gardening and has passed a rigorous review for safety and efficacy.

4. Don't forget to mulch! Two to three inches of mulch can lock in moisture, prevent weeds and help stop the spread of fungal spores that cause diseases like black spot. Natural mulch has an added benefit: it slowly breaks down, adding organic matter to make healthier, richer soil.

5. Blood meal is a natural deterrent of herbivorous critters like rabbits and deer because it signals that a carnivore is in the area. When mixed with botanical oils it is even more effective. (Try I Must Garden™ animal repellent granules.)

6. Try companion planting, the ancient practice of interplanting herbs and flowers in the vegetable garden to attract beneficial

insects while repelling less desirable critters. Marigolds, sweet basil and zinnias are three great all-purpose companion plants to try.

7. To control powdery mildew, try a weekly spray of one part milk to nine parts water. This has the added benefit of acting as a foliar fertilizer, boosting the plant's immune system.

8. No more chemical fertilizers! Healthy soil is a living entity, rich with beneficial bacteria, fungi, nematodes, earthworms, etc. Harsh chemical fertilizers can upset this delicate ecosystem. Fertilize instead with compost, aged manure or a slow release organic fertilizer such as Espoma Garden Tone™.

9. Finally, hang up bird houses and bird feeders. Songbirds are only too happy to patrol your garden for delectable worms and beetles... they're fun to watch and they work for free! 🐦



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