

# Organic Garden Basics

A Seminar with Liza Ehle  
By-The-Sea Gardens



## **Basics:**

- Organics require you to be in touch with your garden, no quick fixes
- Check your garden's location for run-off, pre-contaminants and neighbors
- Start small, convert food crops first, but plan to create organic buffer zones
- Keep size and maintenance manageable so you don't become overwhelmed
- Invest in permanent structures for deer, rodents, and aging/access issues
- Fix your soil before you plant and after every crop, compost your waste
- Add beneficial bug and bird habitat planting to your garden area, practice IPM
- Remove pest harboring debris and keep a tidy garden to avoid pest problems

## **Soil:**

- Before you fertilize or amend, test pH, tilth and fertility, learn from your neighbors
- Almost always add humus and balance pH with lime to boost fertilizer uptake
- Micronutrients can make all the difference, make your own fertilizer blends
- To manage difficult soil, try straw bale gardening, raised beds and double digging
- Learn basic compost rules then compost, compost and compost some more
- Improve your soil before your plant, mid-way through the crop and then cover crop and rotate the bed before using again to avoid pests, diseases and depletion

## **Mulch and weed control:**

- Newspaper, cardboard, leaves and straw all make good basic starting layers for a new bed or reclaiming an old one, let sit 30 days minimum before planting
- Cover this layer with good quality mulch, straw, compost or bagged soil and plant your seedlings in small holes that are additionally improved
- Keep mulch back from plant stems, provide good air circulation and no overhead watering unless during early morning hours to minimize damping off
- Weed daily, before weeds set seed and keep paths mowed or covered between rows

## **Pests and diseases:**

- Use allysum, fennel, dill, salvia, zinnia, sunflowers, marigolds, yarrow, lavender, cilantro to attract beneficials into the food garden, mix them into beds
- Use beer or safe slug bait in shallow containers for slugs/snails but do not apply to soil, try rings of diatomaceous earth or crushed oyster shells around plant stems
- Use floating row covers, cloches and old sheets to create safe zones new plants
- Provide clean shallow water dishes in garden for birds and lady bugs to use
- Post sticky traps to monitor your pests, hand pick daily, stay ahead of infestations
- Purchase bacillus thuringiensis Bt, nematodes and beneficial insects yearly