

ORGANIC GARDENING

The term "organic gardening" is of fairly recent origin. Robert Rodale, son of J. I. Rodale, credits his father with first using the word "organic" to describe the "natural method of gardening and farming". The senior Rodale used it in founding his publication, "Organic Gardening and Farming", in 1942. The term "organic farming" was first used in a 1940 publication, "Look to the Land", by Lord Northbourne (London: Dent). Not just a technique, but a philosophy as well, the components of what we now call organic gardening and farming have been practiced for centuries. Practice of good husbandry of the land was of significant importance to ancient writers such as Cato, Virgil, Pliny and Columella ("The Husbandry of the Ancients", by Adam Dickson. Edinburgh, Scotland: Dickson & Creeca, 1788). The rotation of crops was recommended by Thomas Tusser in his classic and often reprinted work of 1580, "Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry" (Great Britain: n.p.). In this country "green manuring and manures" was discussed in depth by John Wolfinger in the "1864 Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Agriculture" (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1865, pp. 299-328) two years after President Abraham Lincoln established the Department of Agriculture. Pioneers of organic practices in the United States have acknowledged their debt to these men and to those others whose written works continue to influence us. J. I. Rodale, believed by many to be the father of organic practices in the U.S., called Sir Albert Howard of England the "father of the movement". Howard's classic study on soil fertility, "An Agricultural Testament" (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1940) includes a chapter on the "Agriculture of the Nations Which Have Passed Away" as well as observations of agricultural techniques practiced in both the Orient and the Occident. There has always been a wide range of variation in organic gardening practices. From the purist view of followers of Masanobu

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Fukuoka of Japan, who advocates "no tillage, no fertilizer, no pesticides, no weeding, and no pruning" ("The Natural Way of Farming: the Theory and Practice of Green Philosophy", Tokyo, Japan Publications, 1985) to the perspective of those gardeners who seek to combine conventional and organic procedures, the field of opportunity for choice in organic gardening practice is fertile indeed. We hope that this Agri-Topic will assist you in making the choices appropriate to your situation and philosophy. Whether you are landscaping a small city backyard, planning a community garden, protecting the environment and/or your pocketbook, or just endeavoring to grow tastier fruits and vegetables for home or market, we wish you each, "Good Gardening!"

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September, 1989