

Getting started - The Basics

- Look at the conditions you already have, eg sun direction, frost pockets, wind, water levels
- What do you want to use your garden for, eg food, relaxation, pets, children, all of these?
- What do you already have growing?
- Time of year in garden books, bear in mind you are in the north of Scotland. The season is short but very intense. Things that take a long time to reach maturity eg squashes and tomatoes, need a long protected season
- How much time do you have to put into your garden?
- Find methods that help eg rain water collection, raised beds, no dig beds with mulching and green manures
- Have a favourite book to give you inspiration but don't expect your garden to look like the one in the book! (think cookery books programmes, my recipes never look the same)
- Plant more seeds than you think but keep the strong ones
- Seed swap with a friend or neighbour and maybe pass on some spare plants too
- Keep a wild space in the garden, no matter how small
- Mix up your food and flowers, they grow well together and can help avoid pest infestation
- Have fun
- Keep trying, there is always next year!

Getting started with organic gardening

What do you already have? Maybe this is a new garden, or perhaps you have never really had time for the garden? Even if your garden has been "well looked after", my first suggestion is don't rush.

Watch the seasons, spring bulbs, leaf cover and shade will be different.

An organic wild life friendly garden is not tidy, but if you like tidy then some order can still be kept without using pesticides or cutting everything back all the time.

Soil – This is one of the most under-rated parts of a garden, but everything you plant or hope for depends on your soil quality. This might mean a lot of things you can't see and probably don't need to, but ALL the insects and microbes have their place.

So... composting, the best thing you can do to feed your garden is make your own compost, liquid feeds and maybe even have a wormery. While you are waiting there are some good organic products around in local garden centres and online.

Seeds – Whatever you want to grow a neighbour, allotment plot or gardening club might already have spare seeds. You can grow plants organically even if the seeds are not, but be aware F1 varieties will not yield true seed. This is worth knowing if you plan to collect seed from your own plants.

Plants – buying organic plants may be tricky locally (I hope to be able to make some available) but internet sites are useful. If in doubt try to support the small local business. Rescued plants from supermarkets have often suffered poor treatment and will also need to be hardened off (acclimatized to the outside weather).

Raised beds – This is a good way to cultivate a small area and try growing a small selection of plants. Garden centres will sell materials but collecting recycled untreated timber or pots and containers is a cheaper way.

Ponds and water features - If you have space, even a small bird pond, used by frogs to lay spawn is great for wild life. The frogs eat slugs.

Slugs and other “pests” - I actually believe it is best to allow all creatures into your garden, but give them a place to live and make it difficult (or manually remove some of them) from where you are growing young plants.

Weeds – are just plants that you don’t really want where they like to be. Many of them are invasive to other plants, but again you can give them a place. Nettles are important for some butterflies to lay their eggs and make great liquid food. Many other native plants are actually edible as salad, especially in spring (it is always best to be sure if identification first).

Comfrey – My favourite plant. I hope to be able to offer tubers for those who want this amazing, loved by bees, native plant. It grows quite tall each season and can be cut regularly to add to compost, directly into the ground and to make liquid food with nettle.

Lawns – a bizarrely popular monoculture that gets complained about a lot! If you want to keep a grassy area to sit in, play in then seasonal bulbs can brighten it, plus clovers and other wild flowers. This way you also don’t need to cut so often.

Children - We all were at some time and I still enjoy playing, so get your own, your relatives or neighbours children to help out, maybe plant some radish, flowers, watering is fun. If they get started young maybe they will keep going.

Digging – It’s hard work..... BUT, you don’t have to do it! Planning, some organisation and a bit of practice and the “no dig” garden can become a reality. I might develop a whole sheet dedicated to this is the extra time I have from not digging my own garden....