

July 2013



GardenWise

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Sustainable, Organic, Permaculture: What do they mean?

by Craig Mauney, Extension Agent, Horticulture

Sustainable, organic and permaculture continue to be buzz words in the local food movement these days. What do each of these terms mean when gardeners are talking about them. When someone says I am an organic gardener what are they telling you? It is important to understand each of these terms and concepts as a consumer because each technique in gardening is different and of course, as a home gardener, you can mix and match each of these techniques to suit your own gardening needs.

What does sustainability mean?

Preston Sullivan, NCAT Agriculture Specialist gives a good definition of Sustainable agriculture. He says sustainability means growing crops and livestock in ways that meet three objectives simultaneously: 1) economic profit, 2) Social benefits to the farm family and the community, and 3) Environmental conservation. Sustainable agriculture is a system approach where the overall goal of gardening is to produce crops by continuing the health of the land and the people. The sustainable gardener concentrates on the long term solution to problems instead of a short term treatment of a symptom.

What does organic mean?

Organic produce and other ingredients are grown without the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, genetically modified organisms, or ionizing radiation. Animals that produce meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products are not

produced by using antibiotics or growth hormones. The organic grower uses such things as beneficial insects, a diversity of plants, and the use of naturally occurring minerals and compost to supply the plants with their nutritional needs.

What does permaculture mean?

Mr. Will E. Hooker, professor of Horticulture Science at NC State University gives a definition of permaculture. He says permaculture is a sustainable living methodology that focuses on lowering our ecological footprints through such means as alternative forms of housing, localized food production, energy production from renewable sources, water management, and material resource management. Permaculture is inclusive of everything in your environment of living or a way of living, not just gardening or growing things. It teaches us how to build energy efficient homes, recycling

techniques, growing our own food, raising our own animals, and helps to restore diminishing ecosystems. Permaculture is also building your local community and much more.



Photo by Debbie Roos

As a home gardener you find your own way in gardening, trying different techniques that work in your own landscape environment. What works for you may not work for another gardener. What is best is to look around for ideas, try them, and then keep using what works for you and toss out the techniques that don't work in your garden. Gardeners enjoy trying new things and we have fun doing it!

Okra - by Derek Morris, Horticulture Technician

Okra, believed to be of African origin, is one of those foods that most people either love or hate. There doesn't seem to be much middle ground when it comes to okra's rich earthy flavor and somewhat slimy texture. Okra is not only a popular vegetable in the south but is very popular in most parts of Africa, India, and many other tropical countries where it is easily grown. Okra, being of tropical origin, grows and produces very well in our relatively long and hot summers. It is best to direct sow okra in the garden once the weather has consistently warmed up. In our area, May and June are good months to sow seeds. Okra, which is in the Hibiscus family, has large leaves and beautiful large yellow blooms that precede the okra pods and is quite drought tolerant once established in the garden. Okra has hard shelled seed that are best soaked in room temperature water overnight before planting. Germination will be much quicker if seed has been soaked and they should be planted about one inch deep. Individual plants can get quite large depending on the variety and should stand about 18 inches apart though 12 foot spacing is acceptable for more dwarf varieties, so some thinning of plants may have to be done if you sowed them too thickly. Though okra is usually direct seeded it can be started earlier indoors or preferably in a greenhouse to be transplanted later. Keep in mind, okra is a sun and heat worshiper and thus resents any shade or cool temperatures. For this reason, unless you have a greenhouse, it is probably best to direct sow your seeds in the garden once temperatures have warmed up consistently. Okra plants can sometimes be found at certain garden centers.

There are many varieties of okra that have been selected over the years and all will grow well in our climate. Okra is usually not bothered by insects or diseases in our area so is a cinch to grow organically. Japanese beetles can sometimes be a minor problem but they can be handpicked if they become a nuisance. To get the most production, pods will need to be harvested by cutting them off about every other day. Doing so will keep the plants productive up until frost kills back the plants. Okra is a vegetable that can be very productive over a long period of time if harvested frequently. Lots of contact with mature plants cause an itching reaction in some individuals when harvesting so long sleeve shirts may be in order for some. Many have the same reaction when harvesting squash and beans.

While there are many varieties of okra, most have been selected due to pod color, height of plant, or



number of days to maturity. A few of the most common are 'Clemson spineless' growing to 4 or 5 foot and maturing in about 55 days and 'Evertender' a variety from India that matures in about 50 days and growing to about 5 foot tall. 'Burgundy' is an old heirloom variety that starts production in about 50 days and sports attractive deep burgundy pods. This variety can grow quite tall. I have seen it at least 8 foot tall in rich soil. 'White velvet' and 'Silver queen' are also heirlooms that have similar pale whitish green colored pods. These varieties mature in about 60 days and both grow tall. 'White velvet' commonly grows 10 foot tall with 'silver queen' being somewhat shorter but not by a lot. The height of okra seems to be tied more with cultural practices than strictly based on the variety. The farther the plants are apart and the richer the soil the taller the plants will grow.

Regardless of the variety, okra should be harvested when young and tender. Most people harvest when pods are about 3 inches long or shorter. Leave the pods on the plant too long and they become woody and production slows considerably. If you have missed a few pods you might be interested to know that mature okra seeds have been roasted, ground and used as a coffee like beverage and mature woody pods are sometimes used in flower arranging. In my opinion the best use for long, over-mature pods is to save the seeds for next year's okra patch, assuming your variety is not a hybrid, and very few are. Till next time!



THE PRODUCE LADY

Roasted Okra

INGREDIENTS:

12 3-inch okra pods per serving (for example, if serving 4 people, you'll need about 48 pods)
Olive oil spray

DIRECTIONS:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.
Wash and dry okra. Do not cut off ends.
Place on cookie sheet prepared with olive oil spray. Spray okra with olive oil, too.
Bake 15 to 20 minutes, or until the pods start to brown. The okra gets crispier the longer you cook it. Be careful not to burn. Try roasting okra on the grill as well.
Allow 12 pods per serving.

www.theproducelady.org

Landscaping for Wildlife *by Wendi Hartup, Natural Resources Agent*

North Carolina is blessed with a tremendous wildlife diversity of more than 17,000 native species of animals. That's everything from bugs to critters; both terrestrial and aquatic. There are even more critters that migrate in and out of the State throughout the year.

So with all these creatures calling North Carolina home, one might ask where are they and why don't I see more of them? Many of these creatures live in microhabitats under leaf litter, fallen logs or between pebbles and



rocks in our forests and streams. Unfortunately with all the development that occurs throughout our communities, natural habitat is degraded leaving all types of organisms homeless. Researchers predict an additional loss of 5.5 million forested acres in North Carolina by 2040.

Wildlife are also affected by how we, as homeowners, manage our landscape; not just our yard but our neighborhoods and parks. For example, our preference

for monoculture lawns deters many wildlife species. If we could connect more natural areas in our neighborhoods from yard to yard, wildlife would have a corridor of habitat and be less likely to seek our homes for shelter.

To truly thrive wildlife need the same basics that we do: food, water and shelter. We can utilize the following 10 tips to benefit wild creatures.

- 1) Reduce lawns and add groundcovers or islands of vegetation.
- 2) Increase plant structure between groundcovers and trees (aka vertical layering with various heights of shrubs and perennials.)
- 3) Leave dead trees for feeding and nesting.
- 4) Provide water sources.
- 5) Plant native vegetation.
- 6) Provide bird/bat houses and bird feeders.
- 7) Remove non-native aggressive plants as these do not provide essential nutrients for wildlife diets.
- 8) Manage pets.
- 9) Reduce pesticide use and spot treat or encourage beneficial species.
- 10) Encourage neighbors to design wild areas on adjacent property lines.

It can also be as simple as leaving something that already exists in place so that the wildlife can continue living there.

For more information on how to attract wildlife:

<http://www.ncsu.edu/goingnative/>

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/forestry/resources/publications/wildlife.php>

There's More to Tanglewood Park Than Just Horses, Golf and Pools

There's a hidden gem at Tanglewood Park! I bet few of you go around behind the Manor House Bed and Breakfast, but there are wonderful gardens there for everyone to enjoy. The Arboretum at Tanglewood Park contains diverse collections of native flora, herbs and many other landscape materials which are planted and maintained for the education of landscape professionals, area youth and adults, as well as the enjoyment of residents and visitors of Piedmont



North Carolina. The Arboretum at Tanglewood also provides an enchanting and picturesque setting for weddings, receptions and community gatherings throughout the year. The arboretum is carefully maintained by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service with assistance from the Forsyth County Master Gardener Volunteers. So when you have some free time, come on out to Tanglewood and see something new at the Arboretum!

Watering the Garden *by Craig Mauney, Extension Agent, Horticulture*



The amount of water that your garden will need is going to depend on the weather conditions we are having. It is usually very hot in July so the general rule of 1" of water per week may not be enough. The best way to tell if your plants are receiving enough water is to take a trowel or shovel and dig down a few inches. The soil should be moist at least 3-4 inches deep to insure that the water is reaching the root zone of the plant.

The primary rule of summer watering is to water thoroughly and deeply each time and to allow the soil to dry out a bit between watering. Deep watering will allow the plant's roots to grow deeper as well as the added benefit of anchoring the plant into the ground better. Light surface watering actually wastes water, because the water never actually reaches the root zone of the plant. The moisture rapidly evaporates from the top inch of the soil area. If you planted drought tolerant plants in your garden, you won't have to water as often, but the same principal of deep watering applies.

Try to do your watering during the morning hours so that the leaves can dry off a bit before the hot sun hits them. Evening watering is sometimes acceptable if the temperatures are warm enough to insure foliage drying out before the temperature starts dropping overnight. Wet foliage makes plants more susceptible to fungus and diseases.

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