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# Organic Land Care *with*

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June, 2004

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*“ Most of us do not see ourselves as environmental activists,  
but each person...is an infectious agent for change. ”*

Dr. Nils Daulaire  
President and CEO, Global Health Council

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copies and share this  
information.***

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## **What is Organic Land Care?**

Organic is “in”, and everybody wants to jump on the organic bandwagon. We’re inundated with ads for so-called organic products and services, but what does “organic” really mean?

We’re all familiar with the chemical definition, which defines “organic” as containing carbon in its molecule. However, the culture of living organisms is not chemistry!

In organic horticulture we refer to this definition:

**Organic:** of, relating to, or derived from living organisms; a holistic approach which emphasizes the importance of relationships between living organisms and their environment.

### ***Here is the definition developed by SOUL:***

“Organic Land Care is the design, installation and maintenance of landscapes to promote and preserve environmental health both above and below ground. These practices arise from the understanding that all organisms in nature are interdependent, and in order to have healthy plants we must foster the health of the entire ecosystem.

Organic Land Care practices go beyond integrated pest management, beyond the use of so-called organic fertilizers and pesticides. They acknowledge the concept of intrinsic health, and seek to create environments that cater to the well-being of all their inhabitants.

Organic Land Care professionals know that they are but stewards of the land, and can at best hope to work WITH nature, never to dominate it.”

To find an organic land care professional in your area  
please visit the SOUL web site at [www.organiclandcare.org](http://www.organiclandcare.org)





# Secrets of the Organic Garden

By Heide Hermary

*Heide Hermary is president of Gaia College Inc. She can be reached at [heide.hermary@organic-land-care.com](mailto:heide.hermary@organic-land-care.com)*

## ***The secret of synergy***

### **Definition:**

*syn* (greek): together

*synergy* : the joining of energies

Our garden is not just a collection of plants, but the living environment for millions of organisms, most of them too small to even see with a normal microscope. Over millennia, these organisms have evolved to form intricate relationships with each other, and in support of each other. In fact they are so dependent on one another, that the garden can be considered an organism in its own right. A whole greater than the sum of its parts. A product of synergy.

## ***The secret relationships of plants***

In the environment, plants, animals and microbes work together to harvest the elements provided by the soil, sun, air and rain, and to transform them into compounds that make life on earth, as we know it, possible. Plants (on the land), and algae (in the water), have

a unique role to perform: their job is to trap carbon from the air, take what they need for themselves, and trade the rest. One of the elements they get in exchange is nitrogen. Only very special bacteria are able to trap the nitrogen from the air, and again, they keep some and trade the rest. **All other organisms** depend solely on the recycling of these precious elements contained in plant litter and other organic residue.

*One of the most important organic land care practices is to replenish the soil with organic matter, to feed the soil microbes who, in turn, feed the plants. This is what we mean by "taking care of the land": working with nature. Pesticides and chemical fertilizers destroy this delicate balance, and send the landscape into a spiral of decline. Better to let Mother Nature do what she does best.*

## ***The secrets of the soil***

Aside from carbon, which comes from the air, plants take up all other elements they require from the soil. Plant roots effectively mine the soil,

secreting acids to leach the elements from the rocks and soil particles. To help them cover more ground, plant roots have formed symbiotic relationships with special fungi and bacteria, which supply the plant with rare elements in exchange for carbon compounds. These fungi form dense webs, effectively connecting the roots of many different plants, creating this big organism called "the garden". All in all there are so many creatures in the soil that over half the weight of the top few inches of undisturbed soil is made up of living organisms, most of them only visible with an electron microscope!

*Organic land care practices seek to create an undisturbed soil environment that provides its inhabitants with plenty of food, air and water, knowing that plant health depends on a healthy microbial population*

*One of the most important practices is mulching with leaves or compost.*

*Cultivating the soil destroys the delicate fungal webs, and stresses the plant roots and all the other soil life. The best cultivators are nature's own: the worms.*



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# Kinnickinnick

*Native, tough, and ornamental –  
It can't get any better!*

By Laurie Hardy



Laurie Hardy is a Horticulture Instructor and Certified Organic Land Care Professional living in Victoria, B.C. She can be reached at [hardyl@camosun.bc.ca](mailto:hardyl@camosun.bc.ca)

Many native plants can be incorporated into the ornamental organic landscape with ease and with satisfaction. Not all native plants are drought tolerant – but they ARE adapted to our local climate, which provides little natural precipitation in the summer.

One such native plant is the groundcover, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*, commonly known as Kinnickinnick. It lends itself well to the gardens of the Northwest coast and our nitrogen poor soils. Used extensively in commercial as well as private sites, this plant is content in sandy, well drained, exposed sites, dry rocky areas and is excellent at bank and slope stabilization.

In the summer the pinkish-white, urn shaped flowers droop down in clusters from dark-green leaves and are followed by bright -red berries which are present often through the early winter months.

Used as a smoking mixture by the First Nations this handy little evergreen, no more than 20cm tall can be grouped nicely with such ornamentals

as Heathers, Periwinkle (*Vinca minor* and *V. major*) and for contrast with variegated rock cress (*Arabis caucasica* 'Variegata'.



Illustration: Franz Eugen Koehler, 1883 - 1914

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# KIDS in the GARDEN

by Christina Nikolic, Landscape Designer in Victoria, B.C. [stewardshipnld@yahoo.ca](mailto:stewardshipnld@yahoo.ca)

Would you like a hiding place in the garden?  
A secret spot just for you?


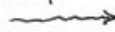
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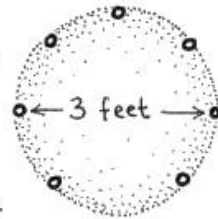
You will need:

- 7 bean poles (bamboo, or pruned tree branches, or tree stakes)  
↳ 6 to 8 feet long!
- a roll of garden twine 
- a few handfuls of compost 
- a pack of pole bean seeds ("Romano", or "Scarlet Runner")
- water 

2

Here is how:

- \* find a sunny spot  and remove all weeds
- \* drive the poles deep into the ground  (leave an opening to get in and out!)
- \* tie the poles together at the top with the twine



3

Planting time!

- ☆ plant 2 to 3 beans at the base of each pole
- ☆ put a little compost in with each bean
- ☆ water regularly

Now, WAIT...



... and as the young plants start to grow, help them find their way up by tying or wrapping them carefully around the poles.

IN ABOUT SIX WEEKS,  
YOUR TEEPEE  
IS COVERED IN  
TASTY BEANS !



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# Have your Garden...and Eat it too!

By Carolyn Herriot

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A walk around your garden will surprise you at how many of the flowers there make wonderful additions to recipes. Try some of the following ideas to change your whole perspective about the way you eat!

Early eighteenth century cookbooks routinely offered recipes for soups and salads that called for marigold, cowslip and violet flowers, and roses have been used to add a note of fragrance and colour to dishes since well before Elizabethan times.

There is no better way of livening up green salads than by sprinkling them with flower petals. A salad tossed with the orange petals of calendula (pot marigold), tangy nasturtium flowers and the stunning violet blossoms of Viola tricolor (Johnny-jump ups) always attracts admiring comments.

Try floating bright blue borage flowers in a punchbowl of lemonade, or better yet freeze them in individual ice cubes and float them in a punchbowl - a gorgeous sight on a hot summer's day! They add elegance as well as their refreshing cucumber taste.

Gladioli and tulip blossoms do not have distinctive flavours but make lovely holding cups for sweet mousses, fruit sorbets or

savoury spreads. Serving appetizers or desserts this way makes an impressive start or finish to any meal.

How about layering rose petals in a fruit compote? Or using rosewater to flavour apple pie? Or blending rose petals and chives into cream cheese for a cracker spread? Yum!



*Borage flower*

The blossoms of dianthus and scented geraniums can be used to add subtle intriguing tastes to sorbets and desserts. Dianthus, the miniature carnation flower, adds a light nutmeg flavour. Scented geraniums vary in flavour from rose to lemon to nutmeg.

The flowers of herbs can also be used to add intriguing flavours to dishes. Lavender blossoms add an appealing scent to custards, flans or sorbets. The leaves and flowers of lemon verbena can be steeped to make a lively lemony herb tea, and add a lemon flavour to custards and flans.

Chive blossoms add a light oniony touch to salads, omelets

and spreads, while the pretty blue rosemary blossoms with their aromatic leaves, will enhance any Mediterranean dish.

Have you ever grown *Carthamus tinctorius*, also called 'Mexican saffron'? It lights up the garden with its flowers that resemble a glowing fire, and can be used as a substitute for the more expensive Spanish saffron.

Zucchini blossoms, (use the male flowers only), can be served in soups by adding them during the last five minutes of cooking and they are also a delicacy dipped in a light batter and deep fried. Stuffing them with different fillings makes a wonderful dish.

Day-lily blossoms are everyday fare in the Orient. Either the bud or the day old spent blossom may be cooked. The flavour is crisp and mild, not unlike green beans. The day-lily flower is a delicacy that most people like on their first taste. Simply steam the flowers for about five minutes, or stir fry them into your favourite Oriental style dinner.

The flowers are best picked around noon on a sunny dry day. Only those grown without pesticides should be eaten, and then only in moderation. Mother used to tell you to "Eat your vegetables," but now modern day mothers tell their children to "Eat your flowers!"

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# Caring for Wildlife

By Heide Hermary

*Heide Hermary is president of Gaia College Inc. She can be reached at [heide.hermary@organic-land-care.com](mailto:heide.hermary@organic-land-care.com)*

When I visited Singapore a few years ago I was struck by the silence of the birds. And then I noticed there were no birds, nor butterflies, nor bees, nor any other insects we have come to associate with functioning ecosystems. The country was undertaking a vigilant pesticide spray program to control insect pests. It was a very powerful experience of the effects of pesticides on the environment.

If we want to have beautiful, healthy gardens we must foster biodiversity. In fact research has shown again and again that plant health increases with the complexity of the food web, both above and below ground. If we want birds, we must have insects for them to eat. If we want ladybugs, we must provide food for the larvae. If we want butterflies, we must expect caterpillars.

Here are three easy ways to care for the wildlife in your garden. Mother Nature will thank you.

1

**Plant flowers, shrubs and trees** that attract beneficial insects. The SOUL website has a long list of beautiful plants that will attract pollinators for your fruit trees, aphid predators and food for the birds.

[http://www.organiclandcare.org/public/beneficial\\_insects.htm](http://www.organiclandcare.org/public/beneficial_insects.htm)

2

**Mulch, mulch, mulch** your soil. Not only will the mulch feed your plants, but you are providing habitat for a large variety of ground dwelling insects. In addition, many predacious insects such as the aphid midge spend part of their life cycle in the soil, and mulch provides them with a moist, protected environment.

3

**Provide ample water** for insects and birds, especially if you rely on drip irrigation. Place some rocks in your birdbaths for the insects to rest on, and set out shallow water dishes in the garden. Research has shown that aphid midges lay considerably more eggs when they have a reliable source of water than without.

## "Organic" Demystified

**Question:**

What is the difference between organic, organic based and natural fertilizers?

**Answer:**

In Canada, fertilizers are regulated through the Canadian Fertilizers Act and Regulations.

**Organic**

"Only products that are solely derived from organic matter (partially humified remains of animals and plants) may be identified or

described as "organic".

**Organic based**

Fertilizers must contain at least 15% organic matter.

**Natural**

Materials that are directly mined from mineral deposits and only subjected to physical processes such as crushing and drying may be described as "derived from naturally occurring sources / deposits". Examples of these materials may include:

phosphate rock; greensand; sulfate of potassium-magnesia that has been derived from ores that have been crushed, washed in water, dried and screened

**Environmentally beneficial**

Any product presented as "environmentally sound", etc. must identify the rationale for the claim and list all ingredients in order to allow the consumer to determine the validity of the statement.



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# Urban Permaculture

## *Okay....So what is Permaculture anyway?*

By Geoff Johnson

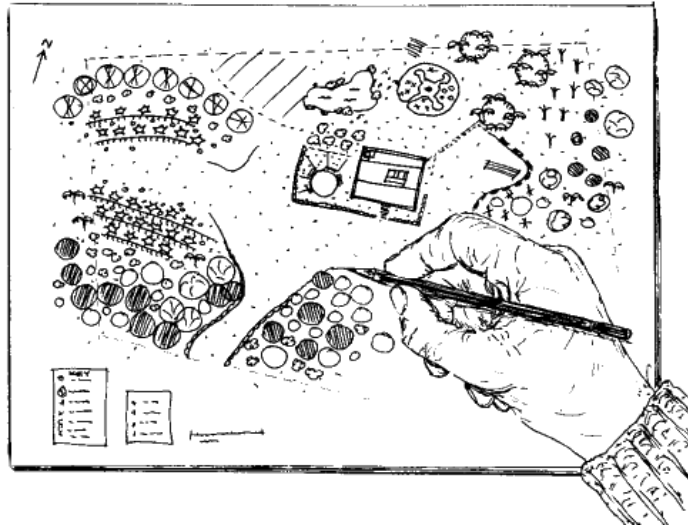
Geoff is a Permaculture Designer in Victoria, B.C.  
He can be reached at [respectyouralders@yahoo.com](mailto:respectyouralders@yahoo.com)



It's always a bit of a challenge to concisely explain permaculture without sounding like a textbook. And yet despite the fact that it's been around about as long as I have (since the mid-70s), I've found that it's still usually necessary to attempt this before one can begin discussing it. Oh well. I'm always up for a challenge.

Permaculture is a way of designing and developing what we might call "sustainable human habitat", settlements that are designed to take account of basic human needs like food, clean water, energy, etc... After all, if these needs aren't provided for to the greatest extent possible from within the community, we tend to obtain them from distant, centralized sources in ways that erode our autonomy, our environment, and, in many cases, our humanity (think oil wars).

But beyond recognizing the need for self-reliance, permaculture uses what we know about natural systems to develop this ideal in a realistic way. By applying the patterns of relationships we observe in nature to the way we design our own communities we can imbue them with incredible



*Illustration courtesy of Instituto de Permacultura Cerrado-Pantanal*

abundance, stability, and resilience.

Now, this may sound like pretty heady stuff (and maybe even a bit "textbook") but I assure you that many solid, real-life examples of these ideas abound on many scales, and that we will focus on them in future articles. Folks always want to know what permaculture looks like, but the fact is that it's really about design and the way things work, not the surfaces of things (which will always change depending on where one is standing).

In Permaculture design it's the relationships between landscape elements that really matter. It's not about installing rain tanks, having a certain kind of tree, building a greenhouse, or keeping chickens. It's about designing a system in which rain tanks irrigate a certain kind of tree that will feed your chickens, who heat your greenhouse. Permaculture is about weaving things together in ways that reduce work, eliminate pollution, and provide in a long-term, sustainable way for people's needs.

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# Education in Organic Land Care

*For Gardeners and Land Care Professionals*

## **Organic Land Care – Working WITH Nature**

This series of eight intensive one-day seminars introduces participants to the science and practice of organic horticulture. Be prepared for a lively and fascinating experience that will leave you with a new awareness of how nature works. This fall / winter 2004 / 05 in Burnaby, Duncan and Victoria.

Instructor: Heide Hermary, President, Gaia College Inc.

For a detailed brochure please call:

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The information can also be downloaded from the Gaia College web site:

<http://www.organic-land-care.com>

## **Certificate in Organic Landscape Management**

## **Certificate in Organic Turf Management**

These very comprehensive on-line programs are geared at landscape professionals and those wishing to enter the landscape professions. They introduce students to a fundamentally different way of thinking about nature. Those who have been practicing conventional horticulture will find many of their practices challenged, and nagging doubts exposed. Beyond that they will discover how the knowledge of sound horticultural practices transfers to the organic management of landscapes.

Please visit the Gaia College web site for more information: <http://www.organic-land-care.com>



## **Subscription Order – Organic Land Care with SOUL**

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