

# REDUCING PESTICIDES

it's perfectly natural.



## GROWING TREES AND SHRUBS ORGANICALLY

Growing trees and shrubs organically involves using a holistic approach, sound organic practices and preventative measures.

### **The Right Plant for Your Location**

Before you decide on any particular tree or shrub, you should study your garden to determine the soil type, its drainage, light conditions, exposure, and availability of water. These conditions will affect the trees and shrubs you grow there.

The key to success in growing trees and shrubs organically is planting the right plant in the right place – a place where the garden conditions match the conditions needed by the chosen plant. At a more practical level, choosing plants whose cultural requirements match your garden's conditions will be less costly, involve less work and be more likely to produce healthy plants. Trees and shrubs planted in locations that suit their needs will settle in quickly and flourish rather than languish and eventually decline.

Choose vigorous, healthy, pest and disease resistant cultivars or species of trees and shrubs whenever possible. Choose plants that are hardy to your zone. Tender trees and shrubs require sheltered locations and winter protection and may not achieve their full potential in size, flowering or fruit production.

Always consider the mature size of the tree or shrub – avoid specimens that will grow too big for their space. Overcrowded plantings invite diseases due to lack of air movement and weak plants.

### **Soil Preparation**

Trees and shrubs generally produce an extensive system of fibrous roots, which take up the nutrients, moisture and oxygen from the topsoil. Add organic matter to all soils, especially sandy soils to increase the fertility and humus content. Amend clay soils to improve drainage. Add bone meal when planting to encourage root development.

### **Care After Planting**

The most important thing you can do for your trees and shrubs after planting them is to water them regularly. All newly planted trees and shrubs need 1 – 1½ ” of water per week during



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the growing season. Soaker hoses are most effective since they minimize run off and evaporation.

Other factors that are important for the ongoing care of your trees and shrubs include:

- Stake young trees with 2 or 3 stakes, the first facing the prevailing wind. Tie with material that will not rub, leaving a few inches of slack. Some movement promotes strong wood development.
- Apply an 18" tree guard to the lower trunk to prevent damage from mice, voles, or rabbits.
- Prune out any crossed, broken or diseased branches on a regular basis.
- When pruning flowering shrubs, avoid pruning off next year's flowers by determining whether it flowers on new growth (e.g. elderberry, Japanese kerria – prune in the late winter – early spring) or on old growth (e.g. forsythia, lilac – prune immediately after flowering).
- Remove all weeds. They compete for space, light, water and nutrients and can serve as a habitat for pests and diseases.
- Apply a loose mulch about 5 inches thick but leave a space of about 6 – 12 inches between the mulch and the trunk of the tree or shrub.

### **Feeding**

Generally trees and shrubs do not require fertilizing; however, during the first few years, when the root system is not fully developed, supplemental feeding may be beneficial in the spring or early summer. The use of organic mulch, such as compost, is often sufficient. Don't overfertilize trees and shrubs since the resulting soft, lush growth is more attractive to insect pests and is more susceptible to winter damage.

### **Preventing Pests and Diseases**

The organic growing process relies on prevention. Healthy plants in the right site are less susceptible to attack. Physiological factors such as drought, compacted soil, and equipment damage cause more problems than insects, fungi or bacteria.

Organic pest management uses cultural, biological and physical controls. Organic chemical controls including botanicals such as pyrethrins should be considered only for very serious problems and only after all other approaches have failed.

Keep your garden free of weeds and debris since these can harbour insect pests and diseases. Walk through your garden on a weekly basis to scout out problems and deal with any in their early stages.