



ECOLOGICAL DESIGN

What is organic farming and gardening?

In its recent mailer, Silver Creek Farm, a 75-acre organic farm in Hiram offered this definition:

Consider that a gram of healthy soil is home to as many as 500 million bacteria, fungi, algae, and microorganisms and you have an idea why organic gardening is simple, yet complex. These many soil organisms create and maintain a balanced system of essential nutrients.

Organic gardeners live on top of the soil, but have a role in protecting and amending healthy soil below by adding compost, planting cover crops and learning as much about maintaining healthy soil through beneficial practices.

Take time to observe and enjoy the ecosystem in your own garden, no matter the size. Such observations will allow you to learn and gain confidence in deciding what plants to grow and how to best manage pests. Try to grow a variety of plants, with consideration for space, color and taste.

Growing organic takes patience, an open mind, curiosity and humility. By growing organically, you acknowledge a cooperation with nature and a collaboration with its intrinsic balance. From this non-aggressive viewpoint, nature begins to be viewed not as a foe, but as a friend and partner.

Advocates of integrating organic gardening and farming into a sustainable living system have been developing a practice known as **permaculture**. Permaculture [or PERMANent agriCULTURE] is a sustainable design system stressing the harmonious interrelationship of humans, plants, animals and the Earth.

One non-profit organization devoted to the practice of permaculture is the Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA). In its report, [Permaculture: Concepts and Resources](#), ATTRA cites founder of permaculture, designer Bill Mollison's principles of permaculture as:

Thoughtful designs for small-scale intensive systems which are labor efficient and which use biological resources instead of fossil fuels. Designs stress ecological connections and closed energy and material loops. The core of permaculture is design and the working relationships and connections between all things. Each component in a system performs multiple functions, and each function is supported by many elements. Key to efficient design is observation and replication of natural ecosystems, where designers maximize diversity with polycultures, stress efficient energy planning for houses and settlement, using and accelerating natural plant succession, and increasing the highly productive "edge-zones" within the system.

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One fifth of all petroleum now used in the United States is used in agriculture. Organic production systems do not rely upon the input of petroleum derived fertilizers and pesticides and thus save energy at the farm.

Pre-dating even the organic food movement is the **Biodynamic agriculture** movement that grew out of the work of 1920s Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner.

"Whereas organic agriculture rightly wants to halt the devastation caused by humans, organic agriculture has no cure for the ailing Earth. Biodynamics asks what was the original source of vitality, and is it available now?" writes journalist Sherry Wildfeuer.

Biodynamics is a science of life-forces, a recognition of the basic principles at work in nature, and an approach to agriculture which takes these principles into account to bring about balance and healing. In a very real way, then, Biodynamics is an ongoing path of knowledge rather than an assemblage of methods and techniques. To read more about Biodynamics, visit the [The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association \(BDA\)](#), a non-profit organization open to the public and formed in the U.S. in 1938 in order to foster, guide, and safeguard the Biodynamic method of agriculture.

Ohio's centerpoint for promoting the benefits of organic farming is [The Ohio Ecological Food & Farm Association \(OEFFA\)](#). OEFFA is a coalition of food producers and consumers formed in 1979 to support and promote a healthful, ecological, accountable and permanent agriculture in Ohio.

OEFFA both promotes and celebrates the wide-scale adoption of organic growing and vigilantly oversees protection of the land and crops from the pesticide residues of large multinational agribusiness which has nearly taken full control of Ohio farms. OEFFA states its goal to "embody a vision for Ohio agriculture which is region and scale specific, responsive to community values, and incapable of being appropriated by multinational corporations."

The OEFFA offers a certification program for the organic farmers of Ohio. Click [here](#) to view a list of OEFFA certified organic farmers in Northeast Ohio.



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