

Fertilizers

The numbers shown on the bag indicate the immediately available amount of major nutrients plants need to grow. N-P-K

- N—Nitrogen: Encourages green leafy growth and plant development
- P—Phosphorus: Encourages blooming and flowering and supports fruit growth
- K—Potassium: Encourages plant vigor and health

Often overlooked is Magnesium (Epsom Salts) which helps the plant deliver and more effectively use major and micro nutrients. Organic fertilizers have low numbers on their bags because they are slow release and need soil microbes to convert them for plant use. They are less likely to burn or damage plants.



Resources

- **Garden Forums:** <http://www.gardenweb.com>
- **Virtual Garden Planner:** https://www.gardeners.com/how-to/kitchen-garden-planner/kgp_home.html
- **Harris County (Texas A&M):** <http://harris.agrilife.org/hort/publications-links/veggies-herbs/>
- **Free organic gardening video:** <http://www.backtoedenfilm.com>

Local Information

- **Hardiness Zone 8 and 9**
- **Last Frost Date: Around March 4th**
- **First Frost Date: Around December 4th**

My green thumb came only as a result of the mistakes I made while learning to see things from the plant's point of view. ~H. Fred Dale

A NATURAL APPROACH TO

Houston Gardening

QUICK START GUIDE



By: Melanie Masten

cattrah@gmail.com

<http://umblegarden.blogspot.com>

Starting Your Garden

Choose a Location

Pick a spot in your yard that gets at least 6-8 hours of sun per day and is not too near any large trees. In a typical suburban plot this is usually on the south or east side of your home.

Build Your Boxes

Use new or reclaimed materials to build raised beds at least 8 inches tall. Cover existing sod or weeds with 3+ layers of newspaper or cardboard. Add 3 inches of garden mix soil or compost. Add 1 inch manure or a healthy casting of poultry litter fertilizer. Add 3+ inches mulch or tree chippings.

Plants and Seeds

Purchase tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, strawberries, asparagus, and herbs from a nursery. Start everything else from seeds in the ground. Move mulch aside and plant into compost or garden soil. Add blood meal and cottonseed meal. When plants grow above the mulch, move it back around the plants.



Care and Maintenance

Fertilize weekly with fish emulsion or if your plants are struggling use a chemical fertilizer to deliver nutrients immediately. Typically, once your garden is established you will not need to fertilize as often. Inspect plants for pests and smash or drop in a bucket of soapy water. Diluted soapy water can also be sprayed sparingly on plants with serious infestations. Trim and remove diseased plants or leaves. Trellis vining plants and protect fruits that attract birds and squirrels with bird netting. Sprinkle diatomaceous earth to dispel ants, slugs and snails. Apply Bacillus Thuringiensis (BT) to stop caterpillars.




Harvest

Pick fruits and vegetables in the morning or late afternoon. Pick tomatoes when they begin to blush and leave on counter to ripen. Refrigerate most other vegetables immediately and consume, can, or freeze within 1 week.

Begin Again

Chop up any healthy spent plants and lay on top of mulch. Remove and discard any diseased or heavily infested plants. Add another layer of manure or poultry litter fertilizer and add 2 inches of mulch or tree chippings. Move uncomposted materials aside and plant in dirt below.

Remember

-  **Keep your expectations low your first year—this is a learning experience**
-  **Start small—Gardens are scalable**
-  **If something doesn't work try something else, DON'T GIVE UP!**