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## Organic Garden Practices Checklist

**Invest time preparing your soil.** Healthy soil is the foundation of a successful organic garden. Amend the soil with compost and organic matter such as shredded leaves to build structure, manage moisture, and increase nutrient content. Or, start a [lasagna garden](#).

### Protect and build the soil.

- Grow groundcovers or spread mulch over exposed soil to manage erosion, moisture evaporation, soil temperatures, and weeds.
- Groundcovers and mulch also provide habitat and fodder for earthworms and microbes. As these creatures decompose organic materials, they build soil humus and nutrient stores.
- Plant cover crops (e.g., buckwheat, rye, clover) between growing seasons or plantings to further protect and regenerate the soil.

**Choose the right plants.** Choose species and varieties that are well adapted to your region's climate and soils, and that have natural resistance to pests. [Native plants](#) are a good option.

**Monitor your garden daily.** It's not just nice a nice habit that gets you outdoors, it's how you keep on top of pests, diseases, and weeds.

- Keep an eye out for pest infestations: hand-pick large ones (like tomato hornworms), and remove smaller pests such as aphids with a high-pressure water spray or by pruning damaged stems. For severe infestations, use pesticides approved for organic gardens -- and by your school district -- such as insecticidal soap.
- Pull weeds while they're small, before they blossom and spread seeds.
- Look for diseased plant parts. Remove infected plants or plant parts to prevent their spread.

For more specific details, see [Safe Solutions to Garden Challenges](#).

**Water judiciously.** Too much or too little water will stress your plants and increase pest and disease problems. The "correct" amount of water depends on what you're growing, your soil type, and other factors. (For more details, see [Wise Watering](#), the July issue of *Kids Garden News*.)

**Rotate vegetable crops annually among your garden beds.** This prevents a buildup in the soil of diseases and pests specific to families of veggie crops (e.g., tomato family: tomato, potato, pepper, eggplant; cucumber family: cucumber, squash, melon; cole crops: broccoli, cabbage, mustard, collard; and so on).

**Diversify!** Grow a combination of perennials, annuals, edibles, ornamentals. This will help your garden attract pollinators, bug-hungry birds and predatory insects, and make it less attractive to pests.

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