

Many new organic gardeners feel the need for a greenhouse, an irrigation system and raised beds, but not for tractors, plows and animals. In this regard, and a few others, I find myself to be more conventional. To use the word organic now, you must follow rules set by the USDA which I don't, and you can use materials which I won't. Greenhouses are used to start seedlings for transplanting. We simply direct sow lettuce and brassica (members of the cabbage family) seeds in the garden. In six weeks or so they are transplanted bare root into another spot at about a foot apart. We never transplant summer squash, melons, okra, beans, cucumber, or corn.

Coldframes make more sense to me for raising the tomato, pepper and eggplant seedlings. They are seeded into the ground, not plastic pots, flats or soil blocks. With their roots in the earth they don't require as much watering or other care. Out bare root plant do wilt at transplanting, but pull out of it just fine. I like the old fashioned way, it is cheaper and easier than a plastic hoop house. A wooden coldframe with window sash looks better to me, too. Building a rich soil humus is much simpler than putting in an irrigation system, which we find unnecessary. Spring rains soak into loose soil and remain to water the crops later. I'm very conscious of soil moisture. After every rain I stir the ground as soon as I can to check evaporation and creates a dust mulch. All old farming textbooks explain this. In a severe drought we mulch with old hay. Food tastes better if it's not been irrigated.

The idea behind a raised bed is that air is incorporated. I'm a big fan of air in the soil, I like it soft and fluffy, but I'd rather have my crops at ground level, or even sunken a bit, where the ground is moister. A raised bed will dry out quickly and require irrigation.

A large garden needs power to till it. Roto tillers are extremely damaging to the soil structure. A chisel plow and harrow used properly can preserve soil structure. Fall plowing heavy soils with a moldboard plow is beneficial because the winter freezing and thawing of the furrows loosens the ground. A small cultivating tractor keeps the soil loose, the moisture in, and the weeds out.

A farm needs the proper amount of animals to supply itself with fertility, Cattle give more manure than the crops they eat require, and this left over manure can be composted and used to grow other crops. This is the basis for traditional agriculture. There is no replacement for animal manure.

To qualify for USDA organic status, the compost pile must reach 150 degrees. I never want my piles to get over 120 degrees, because I value the enzymes and microbes that are destroyed by overheating. So I'm not "organic" anymore.

Many organic farmers use potassium sulfate, commercial chicken manure, and fish emulsions for fertilizing, but I believe these products are detrimental. Any plant based poison, such as rotenone, pyriithium, nicotine and many others, is allowed. A poison is a poison and I don't want them on my food.

My dad was an organic gardener and so was I. The 60's became the 70's and then the 80's. I was still organic. The 90's became the 2000's. Through all of these decades, I tried many of these "organic" practices, and have forsaken them for traditional old time methods. I've held onto the word organic long enough. It now belongs to the USDA, whose farming advice has gotten agriculture into deep troubles and made huge profits for chemical companies. I am now a conventional farmer using practices that are hundred of years old.