

Help! Where Do I Start?

The **Dirt Diva** answers your questions no matter how desperate—including how to get started in organic gardening **BY ANNIE SPIEGELMAN**



I KNOW IT IS SAFER for the planet and better for my family to garden organically, but have no idea what to do first. How should I start? —Maia

I'm not sure how a girl raised and hardened in New York City and transplanted to California became so fanatically obsessed with earthworms, old English roses, and my deluxe compost spinner. But it happened to me. I learned that organic gardening is the practice of working with nature, not against it, by imitating and enhancing its cycles. Here are some tips to start a healthy, sustainable garden.

Step One: Think small. Designing your entire yard at once can be daunting unless you're a professional landscape designer. Look at garden design books and magazines, and conquer your yard a section at a time.

Step Two: Soil is the foundation of your garden. The biggest mistake novice gardeners make is not amending their soil from the start. Adding compost each spring and fall will help retain moisture and nutrients, improve drainage, allow

air in, and support beneficial organisms, such as earthworms—those busy tillers of the garden! Once frost has passed in your area, spade fresh compost 3 to 6 inches deep into your soil.

Step Three: Shop! Two seed companies I admire are Seed Savers Exchange and Seeds of Change. Both companies have been preserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable, organic agriculture for many years. While drooling over flower photographs on their sites, remember to choose some blooms that have nectar and pollen to draw beneficial insects: cosmos, rudbeckia, marigold, sunflower, lavender, lemon balm, and sweet alyssum.

Step Four: Don't forget to pick up a **reference book**, some **stylish gloves** and the gorgeous **copper trowel** at Organic Style.

Lastly, be patient, my sweet kumquats. A garden is always a work in progress. Some seasons look better than others, but it's the lifelong relationship you'll create with your garden that is one of its sweetest gifts. 🍷



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