


# GARDENING for People and Planet

Sustainable Living Series





## Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Organic Gardens for Beauty, Health, Food, and Fun



A Menlo Lab Communities Book

By Tracy Huston and Dave Flanigan

# How to Use This Guide

This guide captures volumes of research and best practices used by organic growers all over the world, along with our own experience, to provide one easy-to-use reference for growing vegetable and herb gardens sustainably. While many wonderful organic gardening books provide more in-depth details than we offer here, we have found that most gardeners need a short, simple how-to resource that covers all the basics and that they can refer to as they grow (and without lugging bigger gardening books around along with shovels and compost and seeds)! Thus, our guide offers everything you need to know (and no more) to use sustainable growing practices.

## Sustainable Growing Practices

- **Organic**: Use natural methods like composting, mulching, and beneficial plants to feed the soil and control pests and weeds—no chemicals.
- **Biodiverse**: Mix plant varieties to build strong ecosystems and reduce risk of disease or pests.
- **Biointensive**: Plant in ways that generate greatest yield with minimum land, water, and other resources.
- **Water-wise**: Use methods like drip irrigation and mulching to conserve water, and also things like swales and rain barrels to harvest rainwater and greywater systems to reuse water.
- **Local**: Grow food within the communities where it is consumed to maximize nutrition benefits and also reduce cost and pollution from long distance transport.

The guide is written to follow the natural sequence from design and garden preparation through the growing season, and across the seasons from year to year. Each section starts off with a brief overview about why the practices offered are important to follow in order to grow sustainably, and then is followed by a series of reference tools to use in each phase of planning and growing. Where useful, we include worksheets you can use to design and evolve your own garden. All tools and worksheets are listed in italics on the table of contents page for easy reference. Sections in the book are color-coded by topic.

Methods and tools are illustrated through “living examples” from our own home gardens, Dave’s in the four-season climate of northern Michigan, and Tracy’s in the two-season climate of Los Angeles. We have also included examples from the Menlo Lab Urban Farming program in the San Fernando Valley—where farmers use sustainable growing practices to provide fresh produce to as many as 50 families every week off less than one-quarter acre—as a model for school gardens, community gardens, and small commercial farms.

With the tools provided here, anyone regardless of experience can grow organically, and with less expense and better results than non-organic methods, creating gardens that yield beauty, healthful herbs and food, and tons of fun!

For those who want to learn more, we list suggested books, websites, and resources at the end of the guide. For now, we hope this guide inspires a lifelong journey in gardening for people and planet.

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# About Menlo Lab

Menlo Lab is a global network of leaders from business, government, non-profits, and local communities dedicated to the cultivation of the economic, social, and ecological conditions needed to sustain well being for all people. We support local leaders and youth in envisioning and enacting the changes they wish to make in their communities. Using a whole system, "inside-out" approach to urban renewal and large system change projects, we first define aspirations based on what people most need and want, then engage all stakeholders in co-evolving vision and prototype designs. Our work in cities throughout the US and globally greens blighted areas while creating jobs, providing access to fresh, organic food (locally grown), generating real-world examples of sustainable living, and building connections among diverse groups that strengthen communities.

This book arose out of our work with urban farmers and youth in Detroit and Los Angeles, developed as part of our jobs training programs. Program participants are taught organic and sustainable food production practices via "living schools" as they create farms in the city, and then establish networks of independent farm businesses that sell fresh, organic produce in the neighborhoods where they live and work. In addition to produce production and distribution, participants are given the opportunity to develop organic nursery businesses and design services for home gardeners who wish to grow organically.

**Living School Training Session: Sowing Seeds for Our Future**

**Living School Training Session: Preparing Beds for Biointensive Planting**

**Living School & First Farm Growing: North Hollywood Jobs Center**

We hope this book will support home gardeners, community gardens, aspiring farmers, and youth groups in adopting and spreading sustainable growing practices in ways that allow us all to become stewards of both people and planet.

***Proceeds from book sales support Menlo Lab's community regeneration work.***

***We thank you for your support!***

***Gardening for People and Planet*** **captures volumes of research on best practices in organic vegetable and herb gardening in an easy-to-use reference guide for home and small farm growers. Simple explanations of organic, biointensive, biodiverse, and water-wise gardening, along with a bounty of inspiring examples, demonstrate both *why* and *how* to garden sustainably. Step-by-step directions and reference tools cover everything you need to know to:**

- **Use permaculture design to create gardens that serve both people and planet.**
- **Prepare and amend garden soil organically.**
- **Make garden beds for both beauty and best use of resources (land, water, materials, etc.)**
- **Use water-wise approaches that not only reduce water consumption but also rejuvenate local water supply.**
- **Grow in harmony with the seasons.**
- **Mix plant varieties to create healthy ecosystems and reduce the risk of plant disease or pests.**
- **Space plants in ways that maximize use of every inch of garden space.**
- **Feed plants and eliminate pest problems organically.**

*"The work that Menlo Lab is doing to spread sustainable gardening practices is a major contribution to society and the planet. This book is a great resource for anyone who wants to grow organically."*
Larry Santoyo, Vice President Permaculture Institute and Founder of Earthflow Design Works

*"This book takes the mystery out of 'organic' growing, and makes it easy for anyone to do. It covers everything, and in 60 short pages. The reference tools are priceless, whether you're new to organic growing or a seasoned gardener."*
Adam Busch, Eco Tech Design Studio

*"I didn't know anything about gardening, much less growing organically. With what I have learned in the Menlo Lab Urban Farming jobs program, I and other farmers are now selling fresh produce, locally grown, every week. It's made a huge difference for me and my children, who now are learning not only farming but also how to grow a business."*
Teodoro Mercado, Menlo Lab Urban Farmer

## Proceeds from book sales support Menlo Lab's community regeneration work:

- Greening blighted urban areas while creating jobs
- Mentoring at-risk youth
- Advancing models for sustainable food production and distribution
- Strengthening communities

**We appreciate your support!**