

Organic Production in the Home Gardening
Rick Abrahamson
SD Cooperative Extension Educator-Horticulture
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Many issues are faced in agricultural production; some of these include pesticide use, soil management, labor management, resource management, and marketing. Marketing is paramount to successful crop production. One marketing strategy that has become important in the past few decades is value added agriculture. Value added means that the grower or the processor adds a tangible value to the crop. Growers may sell produce like lettuce and carrots as ready to eat salads or cut and peeled carrots. They may sell an experience with produce, like pick your own operations or they may produce crops grown under specific conditions. Organic producers do just this and they can expect premium prices for their crop.

In the 1980's standards for organic crop certification were adopted. A certified organic product is one that is "in compliance with the organic standards of a designated certification organization". This means that the certification organization has determined that the grower has been using and continues to use "farm production management that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity to promote healthy crops without the use of synthetic chemicals."

To become certified, a producer must choose a certifying agency, transition into organic production for 36 months and develop a certifiable audit trail. To remain certified the producer submits an application, has an organic inspection, and is reviewed and certified annually.

Gardeners often want to grow vegetables organically. I have had many calls asking how to kill weeds without chemicals or if mulch should be used on the garden. These are the things that organic producers experiment with and find success. A solution of 5 percent vinegar and water can be used as a non-selective herbicide. This mixture will kill all plants and only the tops, it is not translocated to the roots and the plants will re-sprout and have to be sprayed again until the energy in the roots is used up. Flaming can be used to kill unwanted plants in the garden as can cultivation by hoeing.

For insects like Colorado potato beetle gardeners can pick them off of the potato plants and drop them in a jar of kerosene. Using floating row covers will keep most insects off of your garden plants but remember to uncover the plants when bees are foraging so that the flowers can get pollinated.

The home garden should be as organic as possible; all too often we spray chemicals at the drop of a hat. Let's use our head and keep chemical use to a minimum. Collectively, homeowners use more chemicals than farming operations do. For example, if an insect is seen we assume that we must deal with it when, in fact, we should scout for more insects, using a commonsense approach in our decision making.

For questions and comments about organic production in the home garden feel free to call me at 605-394-2188 or email me at ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu.