



## Garden Tips and Techniques: Organic Garden Products

While we're thinking about preparing for the upcoming season, we thought it'd be a good idea to share some of our favorite garden supplies. We've got a list of materials that we rely on to help keep our garden healthy, by amending the garden soil, keeping pests in check, and fertilizing our plants.

Soil amendments build up the foundation of the garden, and feed the plants throughout one or more seasons. Fertilizers provide "snacks" for the plants throughout the growing season, and help give boosts of energy during important growth phases. Organic pest control products offer a last-resort option for managing specific insect populations that have gotten out of balance.

We don't recommend running out and purchasing all of these items. Pick and choose based on the needs that you've had in the past in your garden. Or, bookmark this page, for quick access during the season. In order to determine that manufactured products are safe for organic gardens, look for an OMRI (Organic Materials Review Institute) logo.



### Amendments

1. *Compost.* This versatile soil conditioner helps create an ideal soil texture, which means less watering and better root growth. It's also a great slow-release fertilizer. Make your own, purchase by the bag at grocery or home improvement stores, or get a pickup truck load from a local nursery or supplier like [AgRecycle](#).
2. *Pelleted Sulfur.* In most of Pittsburgh's urban areas, we've found that the soil is basic, rather than acidic like the rest of Western PA. If your vegetable garden soil pH is above 7.0, consider adding Sulfur to lower pH and make nutrients more available.
3. *Greensand.* This marine-derived amendment adds micronutrients and helps create better soil structure over time.
4. *Humate.* A naturally occurring substance that increases plant enzymes, root growth, and beneficial soil organisms. It builds soil organic matter and structure.



*Adding compost to raised beds.*



## Fertilizers

1. *Fish emulsion.* This fertilizer is exactly what it sounds like – emulsified fish. Higher in Nitrogen than other fertilizers, it is great to use when watering in new transplants.
2. *Seaweed powder.* Like a multivitamin for plants! Combine with fish emulsion to water baby seedlings or spray onto leaves on cloudy days throughout the season.
3. *Dried blood.* Strictly a Nitrogen source. Add a little each year to the soil. Cottonseed meal and feather meal can substitute.

## Pest Control Products

1. *Insecticidal soap.* Amino acids that kill soft-bodied pests like aphids and whiteflies. Will not kill adult beneficial insects. Don't spray very young plants or in sunny conditions.
2. *B.t.* A naturally occurring soil bacteria that kills caterpillars. Take care to avoid caterpillars that become butterflies.
3. *Diatomaceous earth.* Derived from tiny, crystalline marine creatures. Feels like powder to humans, but has sharp edges on a microscopic level. Useful against slugs and hard-shelled insects.
4. *Sluggo.* Iron phosphate based product that repels slugs and snails. Safe to use around children and pets; eventually breaks down into fertilizer.
5. *Neem.* An oil extracted from a tropical tree. Useful to lower populations of many pests but does not completely eradicate them.
6. *Dried blood.* Repels deer, rabbits, groundhogs, and other animals. Also a fertilizer.

You can find some of the products above at local plant nurseries like the [Urban Gardener](#), health food stores, or even big box stores. But sometimes, finding exactly what you're looking for can be tough locally. We rely on seed companies like [Johnny's Selected Seeds](#) and Fedco's [Organic Growers Supply](#), along with [Gardener's Supply Co.](#) and just plain old Google searches to find what we need.

