

Edible Gardening Series with Sarah Bostick and Carol Wyatt-Evens UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County

Resources from Session 9: Fertilizing Your Garden

Getting your soil tested:

- The UF/IFAS Extension Office in Sarasota County (where Carol and I work!) has a very handy webpage that lays out the options for getting your soil tested in Florida:
 - <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota/gardening-and-landscaping/horticulture-residential/soil-test/>
- If you live outside of Florida, reach out to your local Extension office to learn about your soil testing options. This neat website gives you both the history of “land grant universities” across the nation and an interactive map to find Extension in your state.
 - <https://nifa.usda.gov/land-grant-colleges-and-universities-partner-website-directory>

Florida gardening books and planting guides:

- *Vegetable Gardening in Florida* by James Stephens (book)
- *Organic Methods for Vegetable Gardening in Florida* by Ginny Stibolt and Melissa Contreras (book)
- University of Florida online planting guides. Find the whole list here:
<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/planting/vegetable-gardens-by-season.html#:~:text=In%20Florida%2C%20fall%20is%20an,%2C%20Brussels%20sprouts%2C%20and%20radishes.>
- Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide (11-page UFL publication): <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>
- Grow to Learn School Gardening Guide (112-page UFL, downloadable publication written for school gardens but helpful for all Florida gardeners) <http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota-docs/hortres/GrowtoLearnSchoolGardeningGuide.pdf>

Sourcing “organic” fertilizers

- If you prefer to use fertilizer products that fall into the category of “acceptable for use on certified organic farms”, look for the word “OMRI” on the packaging. OMRI stands for the Organic Materials Review Institute.
- To learn more about how OMRI designates products acceptable for use on certified organic farms, check out their website: <https://www.omri.org/>
- Here’s what the label will look like on packaging:



Answer to a question asked during Q&A

Question: Is it okay to put straight fresh chicken poop on garden?

Answer: This question was answered in the chat box during the workshop, but it is such a great question that I want to answer it more fully here. Chicken poop *can* be a good source of fertility and organic matter if it is used correctly. It is also really easy to unintentionally create issues in your garden by using fresh chicken poop.

There are two big reasons *not* to put fresh chicken manure directly on your garden beds:

1. Fresh chicken manure is very harsh and can literally burn the leaves, stems, and root systems of your plants.
2. Fresh chicken manure generally contains both E. coli and Salmonella – two bacterias that can make you and your family very sick.

So, how do you turn fresh chicken manure into a good, safe source of fertility? Compost it! Most people who have a chicken coop use wood shavings or something similar on the floor of their coop. Each time you clean out the coop, put the poopy shavings in a dedicated compost pile. Depending on the weather, temperature, and size of your pile, you will have a “finished” compost in a few weeks or months. A good indication that your chicken manure compost is nearly ready: it smells earthy and clean.

To ensure that pathogens are killed, your compost must reach a temperature of 140 F to 160 F. If you plan to regularly compost chicken manure and add it to the garden, investing in a compost thermometer is a very good idea.

If your compost pile never gets quite hot enough or you don't have a thermometer, it is a very good idea to err on the side of caution by following this rule of thumb: wait 120 days from the day you put un-composted or partially composted chicken manure on a garden bed before eating anything out of that garden bed. The 120-day waiting period helps to ensure that any pathogens the manure contained are no longer active in your soil.

If you want to delve one layer deeper into the topic, this is a really well-done University of Nevada publication about using chicken manure in your garden:

<https://extension.unr.edu/publication.aspx?PubID=3028#:~:text=The%20answer%20is%20to%20use,can%20harm%20people%20and%20animals.>

Feel free to reach out with questions any time!

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