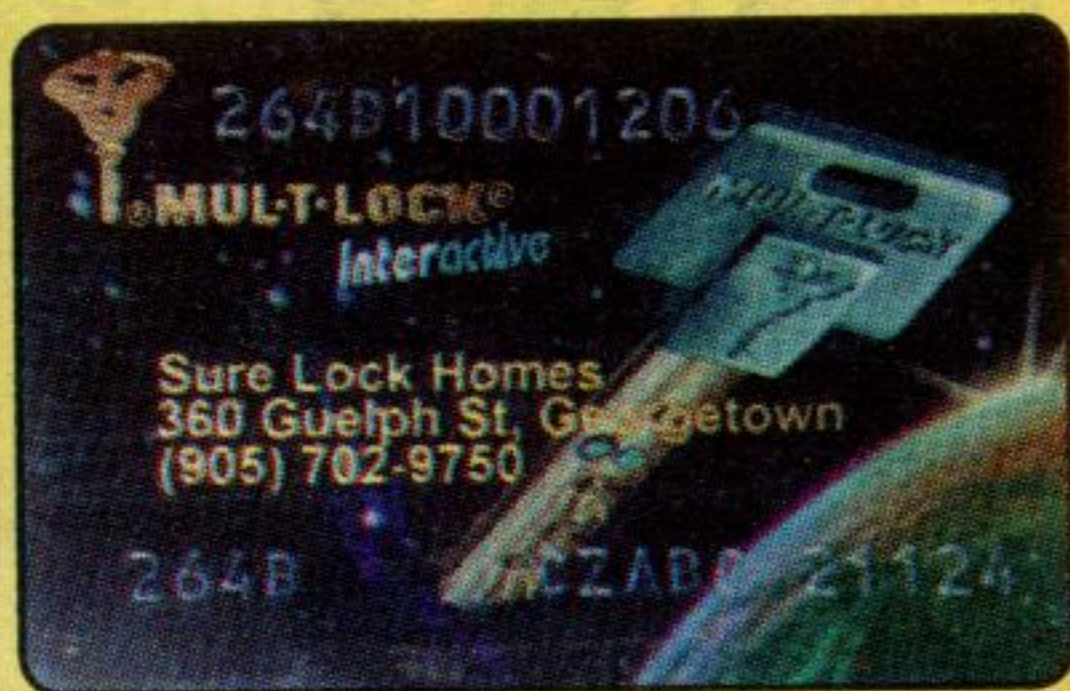


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Organic growing a good idea

Many of the new materials we have available to us as gardeners are the result of advances made in the field of agriculture. In the past 100 years, the world's farmers have been faced with the challenge of feeding a growing global population, at the same time as urban development has reduced the amount of land available for growing crops.

To meet the challenge, farmers had to find a way to get more food out of fewer acres. They've succeeded, by using technology to its fullest. Tractors replaced horses, and machinery and chemicals replaced a great deal of backbreaking labour. Many of these advances were also adopted by home gardeners.

A look at growing things... before 20th century technology

In 1881, an Ontario Agricultural Commission reviewed some of the methods farmers were using to improve crop yields.

Even back then, growers knew they had to keep replenishing the nutrients in the soil, or crop yields and quality would eventually dwindle.

Issues such as chemical residue in produce, ground water contamination and soil depletion were a long way in the future.

A lot changed in just 100 years...but a lot remains the same

Now, many farmers and gardeners are taking a step back, and re-examining early growing practices. Some are willing to trade a little yield for a different kind of crop quality; one that's also good for the health of the consumer, the soil and the environment.

Growing organically, without losing what we've learned

Modern agriculture has brought many scientific advances that are of tremendous value, even for organic growing. For example, we can now predict quite accurately which nutrients various plants will need in order to maintain healthy growth.

A simple soil test tells how much nutrients are available in the garden soil. It's then just a matter of adding any extra nutrients required to maintain healthy, balanced plant growth. Often, these needs can be met with organic fertilizers.

Today's organic fertilizer choices

When many gardeners think of organic fertilizers, they think of manure. But while manure is very good for improving soil texture and organic content, it often lacks the essential nutrients plants need.

Compost is excellent for improving the organic content of the soil, and contributes valuable nutrients. Use compost as much as you can.

Excellent quality organic fertilizers are also available from your local garden centre. The Green Earth line is one example: it offers natural ingredients that meet nutritional needs of plants.

Don't overlook "conventional" fertilizers in your search for organic plant nutrition. Some of these, such as the Golden Vigoro line, are formulated in an organic base, and contain higher levels of nitrogen needed by growing lawns. Avoid brands that contain little or no controlled-release nitrogen.

—News Canada

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