

## Why Use Organic Gardening Products?

By Suzan Ormandy, Mc Donnell Nursery Orinda

"I'm not going to eat azaleas, so why should I use organic fertilizer on them?" our nursery customers often ask. Why indeed, especially as organic products cost a bit more than their synthetic counterparts. We at Mc-Donnell Nursery, in Orinda, promote the use of gardening products and methods that are as natural as possible for several reasons.

First, they have less impact on our environment, including big resources like the water table to little creatures, like beneficial bees, our pets and our kids. This is obvious in the case of pesticides and herbicides, but let's get specific with the example of snail baits: a one-pound container of Sluggo at \$9.99 has iron sulfate as its active ingredient, something that not only improves your soil but also is safe around pets and wildlife; on the other hand, a one-pound container of a popular synthetic bait, costing \$8.99 and comprised of methaldehyde and carbaryl is "extremely toxic" to fish, "may be fatal to pets," and is potentially toxic to the human central nervous system. (Most of this information is taken straight from the label.) That extra dollar seems pretty cheap given the alternative.

Another reason to choose organic products is that they create more natural

conditions and growth. As for conditions, healthy gardens begin with healthy soil, and revitalizing it with Soul Soup, a worm-compost tea, couldn't be more effective – or natural. The microorganisms from this product and

Flower and Vegetable Planting Mix or generic compost and mulches encourage habitation by earthworms and similar tiny critters that improve soil structure, which in turn promotes healthy root systems for

ishing micro life in our soil and eventually flourishing plant life in our gardens. Also, plants that develop naturally — albeit more slowly — are less prone to insect invasions.

ally finding its way to the water table. Again, not a good thing, and one that goes against the increasingly popular and smart idea of sustainability.

Also, given the recent frost damage and loss that many of our gardens suffered, remember that fast new growth also makes plants more vulnerable to frost. Any season is good for organic product use, but in Winter it is especially recommended.

Many Lamorinda homeowners devote much time and money to achieving lush lawns and are skeptical that organic products work for this. Actually, the goal of healthy green lawns can be facilitated more effectively by organic products like E. B. Stone's Nature's Green Lawn Food. Like most of today's organic fertilizers, it contains both humic acid and mycorrhizae, both of which encourage robust root systems. Strong roots produce healthy disease- and pest-resistant turf. This result can be enhanced further by top dressing your lawn with a thin layer of organic matter like our store-brand Forest Blend as well as two or three applications of Soil Soup (applied with a hose-end sprayer) per growing season.

Because even the healthiest lawns and plant beds de-

velop weeds, many gardeners turn to pre-emergent herbicides to reduce these intruders. Our nursery sells a corn gluten pre-emergent weed preventer which sells for only a bit more than its chemical counterpart (\$23.99 vs. \$20.99/10-lb.) and is equally effective and much safer to use.

Even simple household woes like ants, fleas and roaches can be effectively remedied with organic products. Diatomaceous earth, for example, can be used indoors and out. It is comprised primarily of microscopic algae with silica; this powder enters the insects and desiccates them, with virtually no health risk to your children or pets. Similarly, instead of Raid, why not use spray insecticides made of orange-peel extract or herb oils? They're effective and safe — and definitely smell better when applied!

The organic gardening movement in the U.S. began in the 1960's and is here to stay. Edible or ornamental plants as well as our larger environment do better with natural products and methods.

We at McDonnell Nursery seek out new organic products that benefit our customers, their gardens and a sustainable future for all.



from other organic amend-

ments like E. B. Stone's stronger plants. More organic matter results in flour-

While the quick new growth produced by synthetic fertilizers may be impressive in the short run, it is more attractive to aphids and many other undesirable insects. Using synthetic fertilizers with high percentages of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium — like a popular 15-30-15 formulation — is a little like giving your plants steroids: you'll probably get big results fast, but that's not necessarily a good thing. As noted above, plants become more vulnerable to some insects and diseases, and the environment also suffers because plants can't generally take up such high concentrations of these nutrients and the excess runs off, eventu-



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