

Starting an Organic Market Garden

This playbook provides a guide on establishing and running a small-scale organic market garden. It covers essential steps from planning, production, to marketing, with emphasis on engaging the community while selling organic produce.

Step 1: **Planning**

Start with a detailed plan covering what crops you want to grow, the size of the garden, the market demand, and the resources needed. Look into local regulations for organic certification and market selling.

Step 2: **Site Selection**

Choose an appropriate site for your market garden, considering sunlight, soil quality, water access, and proximity to your market. Test the soil and amend it if necessary to meet organic growing standards.

Step 3: **Design Layout**

Design the garden layout with crop rotation and companion planting in mind to enhance soil fertility and pest management. Include space for infrastructure like paths and storage.

Step 4: **Seed Selection**

Select high-quality, organic seeds suited for your region's climate and soils. Consider the market demand for certain types of produce and any niche markets you can serve.

Step 5: **Soil Preparation**

Prepare the soil using organic methods such as composting, green manures, and no-till practices to enhance soil health and meet organic standards.

Step 6: **Planting**

Start seeds in a nursery area or plant directly into the soil, depending on the crop's needs. Follow organic practices throughout the planting process.

Step 7: **Irrigation**

Set up an efficient irrigation system. Consider drip irrigation for water conservation and to reduce foliar diseases.

Step 8: **Pest Management**

Implement organic pest control strategies such as natural predators, barriers, and manual removal to protect your crops.

Step 9: **Harvesting**

Harvest produce at its peak quality, using methods that maintain the integrity of the plant and the soil.

Step 10: Marketing

Develop a marketing plan that can include a CSA program, farmers' markets, local restaurants, and community events. Utilize social media and local networks to promote your garden.

Step 11: Community Engagement

Get involved with the community by hosting workshops, farm tours, or volunteer programs to increase visibility and customer loyalty.

General Notes

Certifications

Research the specific requirements for organic certification in your area, as these can vary and may impact your garden design and operations.

Record Keeping

Maintain detailed records of garden activities, inputs, and harvests to comply with organic certification and to monitor your business' progress.

Financial Planning

Create a budget that includes startup costs, anticipated income, and operating expenses. Seek funding or grants if necessary.

Continuing Education

Stay informed about organic gardening practices, regulations, and market trends to improve your operation and ensure compliance.

