

# **4     Cost-Effective     Organic Garden Fertilizers**



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# Organic Garden Fertilizers

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Regardless of what you're growing, your plants need nutrients. Without fertilizer, your plants will fail to thrive and grow big and strong. In the case of edibles, a lack of nutrients

can limit your crop and lead to poor production. Unfortunately, many fertilizers on the market are expensive. Thankfully there are cost-effective organic fertilizers you can use to boost your garden's productivity.

## A word of caution

Before I jump into a list of cost-effective organic fertilizer suggestions, I want to talk a bit about fertilizing in general. Piling on fertilizer will NOT automatically make your garden more lush and productive. Fertilizing without testing your soil first can lead to a host of problems down the road. With fertilizer, more is not always better.

Always [test your soil](#) first to find out whether your garden is lacking nutrients. Read up about plant nutrient needs to ensure you're applying the right fertilizer.

While organic fertilizer is a lot less harmful to the environment than synthetic fertilizer, too much of it can still pose problems, so be cautious! If you think your plants are hungry for nutrients, double check first. They may be stressed or ailing for a different reason.

Organic fertilizers are an excellent alternative to synthetic ones because they help build soil quality over time and improve the soil's ability to retain nutrients and water. They're a lot less concentrated, which helps prevent overfertilization—though, it's still possible with certain commercial options.

## Cost-Effective Organic Fertilizers

Fertilizers can be expensive. Organic options are even more so! So what are the options available for a frugal gardener? Here are a few cost-effective organic fertilizers to choose from:

**Worm castings.** Set up a worm farm or attract worms using a

[bucket system](#) and enjoy the fruits of their labor. Castings is a nice way of saying poop, but this excrement is mighty powerful! Worm poop is high in nitrogen and full of beneficial microbes and bacteria.

**Coco coir.** Coconut husks are an inexpensive, earth-friendly alternative to peat moss. While coir doesn't contain nutrients, it helps condition the soil and improves water and nutrient retention. It's also a great mulch option.

**Homemade compost.** It's easy to make your own compost at home! You'll need a balanced mix of kitchen scraps and other materials like dead leaves and grass clippings to get some rotting action going. Over time, the materials break down into a powerhouse of nutrients for your garden.

**Seaweed.** Sea kelp fertilizer is pricey, but if you live near a shoreline, you can collect your own smelly seaweed, let it rot for a bit, and make a seaweed fertilizer tea. It's not ideal for people who are sensitive to pungent smells, but it's a great totally free source of nutrients!

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## How to Reuse Grow Bags





Grow bags are an excellent container option for the frugal gardener. They're extremely versatile and work for a variety of plants. Did you know that you can reuse them from year to

year, too? Here's how to reuse grow bags and save money down the line.

## What is a grow bag?

A grow bag is a flexible container for growing plants. It's usually made out of a breathable fabric. The breathable material lets air and water through but keeps all your earth neatly contained.

## Benefits of using grow bags

Grow bags have a ton of wonderful advantages and are especially useful for frugal gardeners. They are great for:

**People on a budget.** If you don't have a lot of money to spend on fancy containers, grow bags are an excellent choice. They're fairly durable, so you can reuse them for several years.

**People without a lot of room.** If you have a small space or are gardening on a patio or balcony, grow bags are an excellent option. They're available in multiple sizes, and when they're empty, they fold down flat. You can also drag them around in spaces where the light moves around quite a bit, which can help you keep your plants happy.

**Temporary gardening spaces.** Not sure if you'll be gardening in the same location next year? Use grow bags! When you're done, they can come with you. They're easy to store and transport when empty.

**Certain plants.** Grow bags are great for growing certain kinds of plants. I'm particularly fond of growing potatoes inside large grow bags. It keeps the potato plants contained, and at the end of the season, I just dump out the earth making it easier to spot ready-to-eat tubers.

**Beginner gardeners.** If you're new to gardening, building [raised beds](#) or creating an in-ground plot can seem like daunting tasks. Grow bags are easy and convenient growing vessels that require not an ounce of physical labor.

## How to reuse grow bags

You'll get more life out of your grow bags if you empty them and store them in a dry place over the winter. Dump out the earth in your compost bin (or in a raised garden bed, if available) and then rinse, dry, and store your bags for the season.

You can also leave them full of dirt and reuse them next year. You'll need to mix in fresh [compost](#) next season.

However, if any of your plants were diseased or experienced severe pest infestations, you're better off safe than sorry. Toss out all the dirt and start fresh.

Some grow bags are also safe to toss in the washing machine, which is great if you need to sterilize them once the growing season is done. Never put grow bags in the dryer, though. The heat can cause shrinkage or weaken the fabric.

By reusing your grow bags, you can save money and avoid waste.

If your grow bags rip, don't throw them away! You can use the pieces as a weed barrier in pots or raised beds.

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## 5 Winter Squash Varieties for

# **the Frugal Gardener Short on Space**





*5 WINTER SQUASH VARIETIES*

*for the Frugal  
Gardener Short on  
Space*

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Wondering which types of winter squash are best for small gardens? Read on to find out about compact winter squash varieties that provide the most bang for your buck. They're



perfect for the frugal gardener!

Summer squash gets all the glory. It grows quickly and provides a high yield. My all-time favorite variety patty-pan matures in less than two months in the right conditions and keeps on giving throughout the season.

On the other hand, winter squash requires a longer growing season and, in most cases, needs more space than summer squash. Does winter squash belong in the frugal garden? Absolutely! Squash—winter or summer—is a nutritious, staple vegetable that's worth growing. Pumpkin is a winter squash variety that I covered about a week ago. The [post](#) contains information on the challenges of growing a large vining crop like pumpkins.

## **Difference between winter and summer squash**

Winter squashes have hard flesh and thick skins, unlike their delicate summer cousins. I should point out that winter squashes aren't actually harvested in December, as the name suggests. Instead, they're picked in the fall and are easily preserved throughout the winter months because of their thick-skinned character. Winter squash keeps much longer than summer squash. To ensure your squash lasts as long as possible, be careful not to prick or damage the outer skin.

Note that some winter squashes don't keep as long. Use these up first!

## **Best varieties to try out**

If you're tight on space, vining varieties are a no-go unless you have the patience to train and trellis your squashes vertically. Personally, while I love seeing vertically grown produce in other people's gardens, I haven't yet mastered the

technique. In the past, my handmade trellises haven't been strong enough to hold heavy squashes, and they mostly ended up taking up ground space.

Bush or semi-bush varieties are a viable option for space-starved gardeners. Bonus: they don't take as long to mature as other squash types. Most compact squashes have cute names that signal their miniature plant size.

Here's a handy list of compact winter squash varieties for those with less room:

- [Sugar Dumpling](#)
- [Bush Delicata](#)
- [Burpee's Butterbush](#)
- [Red Kuri](#) – One of the first winter squashes I ever grew in a shaded patch of garden at my parent's home. I managed to get a single beautiful bright red squash. I barely knew what I was doing, and it's insane that anything grew in that patch of dirt, but this will forever be a favorite of mine.
- [Sugarbush](#)

## Tips for growing winter squash

Some folks prefer to start seeds indoors and transplant winter squash seedlings in the early summer months, while others find direct seeding is more successful. I've had some success with direct sowing, but the very variable weather is always a challenge.

Planting squash of any type, even compact winter squash varieties, gives your plants plenty of room. Crowding your squash babies is likely to stunt growth and result in a less than stellar yield.

Finally, don't be afraid to experiment. If you want to try your hand at vertically growing butternut squash or letting

those pumpkin vines flow along your garden path, go for it. No rule says you can't.

**Source:**

***<https://extension.umn.edu/vegetables/growing-pumpkins-and-winter-squash-home-gardens>***  
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## **Free Funeral Home Plants**



Before you discount the idea of free funeral plants, bear with me on this one. Getting free plants from a funeral home is possible. However, you may have to step out of your comfort

zone for this trick. Even those of you who consider yourselves outgoing might feel a bit odd about using a funeral home as a free plant source (This is one of the main reasons I left it out of [Ways To Get Plants For Free](#)).

Funeral homes are an excellent place to get free plants because almost everyone has the same initial reaction as you did. Ultimately, this means that in a nation where there is competition for virtually everything, this is one area where hardly a single person is taking advantage.

Almost every town has at least one funeral home and most funerals involve flowers and [plants](#). Years ago, I became aware that many families leave plants and flowers at the funeral home for various reasons. Often, it's because many people just don't have the space for all of them at home.

## How to Get Free Funeral Plants

Here's how to set up a local funeral home connection.

The first step is to call the funeral home, introduce yourself, and explain your offer to them. You can solve their problem of what to do with the plants—at no cost to them. If they express any interest at all, leave your name, phone number, and email. You should promise to pick up any plants within 24 hours of a phone call.

If you don't sense a positive reaction to your offer, ask to speak to a supervisor or owner, and repeat the offer. If that call doesn't garner some interest, thank them and move on to the next name on your list.

You might be surprised when you get your first return phone call. At this point, ask for specific directions as to when and where to pick up the plants. Follow them to the letter. After the first pick up, follow up with a note to the funeral home, thanking them and giving them your contact information



again.

## What to do With Your Haul

Once the plants are at home, do some sorting and decide which plants can go outdoors and which are going to become houseplants. Depending on the time of year and the weather in your zone, you can either get your new plants in the ground or treat the whole batch as house plants until you can safely plant them outside.

There may be a few plants in the bunch that has seen better days by the time you get them home. This is nothing to fret about. You can add the plant to your compost pile, put the soil in your container of [potting mix](#) and clean up the pot so you can put it to good use.

All in all, you stand to gain many plants for very little effort. It's all a matter of getting over that first hurdle most people have about dealing with a funeral home.

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## DIY Compost Using a 5 Gallon Bucket



Compost is an essential medium for any gardener. It enriches the soil, provides nutrients to plants, and helps improve soil composition. It's also easy to make compost using simple items

you probably have lying around your home. Here's how to make a 5-gallon bucket compost bin to get yourself some free compost.

## Tools

I covered a similar topic earlier this year when I blogged about creating a low-cost [worm compost bin](#). If you're not a fan of worms and want to avoid dealing directly with creepy crawlies, here's an alternative method for creating your own compost.

Often, people use storebought bins to compost produce scraps and yard refuse. You can also build a bin from scratch. If you're not very handy and don't have room for a full-size compost bin, you're in luck! A bucket compost system works in a pinch and is great for people who garden on their balconies or porch.

What do you need?

- **A 5-gallon bucket.** That's pretty much it. If you don't have one, you can probably grab one at your local hardware store for cheap. But ask around, someone you know might have one they don't need.
- **A drill.** This is to drill holes in the bucket. If you don't have power tools, use a hammer and nail.

## Assembling Your DIY Compost Bin

Take your 5-gallon compost bucket and drill holes in the bottom and the lid. You need to let the compost aerate to prevent mold growth.

Use something at the bottom of your bin to prevent the drainage holes from getting lodged with waste. You can use sticks, rocks, whatever works.

The next step? Filling up the bucket!

You can fill your 5-gallon DIY compost bucket with fruit and veggie scraps, grass clippings, and other compost-friendly materials. Not sure what you can put in? Here's a [handy guide](#).

It's best to keep your bin outside to prevent odors from stinking up your home. Roll the bin around occasionally to ensure the materials mix together. If you choose to line the bottom of your bin with rocks, it may be tougher to mix the contents, though.

Always make sure the lid is tightly affixed to the bucket to keep pests from breaking in and feasting on your rotting materials.

## How Long Will it Take?

It can take a while for matter in your compost bucket to decompose fully. The rate of decomposition depends on the weather, where you live, and what you stuff inside. Avoid filling the bin up too much. If there's not enough air, it'll take longer for stuff to break down.

Help your 5-gallon bucket compost bin contents along by putting your bin in a spot with lots of [sunlight](#).

*Need a visual guide to get your 5-gallon compost bucket ready? Check out this YouTube tutorial:*

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## 10 Ways to Get Free Plants





*Get free plants and save money on your favorite pastime.*

While gardening is one of the largest hobbies in the US, how



expensive a hobby depends a lot on how you approach it. It can be quite an expensive hobby when you purchase everything retail. However, it can also be an extremely frugal hobby for those who put a little extra time and creativity into how they get their gardens started.

In fact, it is quite possible to get an entire garden of plants for free. It's a challenge that I succeeded in doing in the past. Below you'll find ten ways that I was able to accomplish growing my garden for free.

## **How to Get Free Plants**

Free plants? Sounds like it's too good to be true!

It's actually way easier than you'd think to source plants for free. Here are 10 ways to get free plants for your garden.

### **Craigslist and Other Online Marketplaces**

Post a wanted ad on Craigslist, asking for free plants. Most gardeners love to help others out when they have excess in their own garden. (If you have some plants already, this is a great place to offer to trade plants). Another free site you can request free plants is on FreeCycle. You can also browse online marketplaces to find people who are giving their plants away for free. I often find local sellers giving away houseplants, cuttings, and perennials on the Facebook Marketplace. Something else you might find on these sites is free dirt. When people do any kind of landscaping or construction, there's often a lot of digging going on. They're left with a pile of dirt and nowhere to put it. Usually, as long as you have a way to pick up the extra soil, it's all yours!

### **Nursery**

While you wouldn't typically think about getting free plants

at a nursery, they can be an excellent place to get them. Always take the time to ask if the nursery has any plants that they're going to be tossing? A part of the business is that sad-looking plants don't sell well and they need to get rid of them somehow. That often means throwing them out. When you pick up free plants this way, they won't look very good the first year, but with some TLC many can make a wonderful come back and look great for years to come.

## **Landscaping Crews**

Another great place to get free plants is from landscaping crews. If you see a landscaping crew working on a job where they are replacing displays, be sure to stop and ask what they are going to do with the plants they are taking out. Often times the plants being replaced are going to be thrown out or composted. It doesn't hurt to ask, and more often than not you'll come away with a large number of plants.

One note with this approach is that you'd better be prepared for them to "gift" you with everything they were going to compost. You will want to travel with a kit for these situations in your vehicle which includes empty boxes, buckets, trash bags, garden gloves, etc. This approach is especially effective in civic gardens or at large commercial jobs.

## **Yellow Pages**

Not having luck in finding landscapers on the road? Another effective approach is to open up the yellow pages and get on the phone. Call all the local landscapers and gardeners listed. Ask what they do with plants they remove from jobs. If they give you any indication that they toss those plants, offer to go pick up the garbage-bound plants. You'll save them the money it would normally cost in disposal fees.

## Friends and Family

If you have friends that also garden, then you have a treasure trove of free plants waiting for you. Tell all your friends you're interested in adding to your garden and you'd be happy to help them divide their perennials, especially if they will share new starts with you.

## Strangers

Heck, there's no reason to stop with friends. Tell perfect strangers that you're trying to add to your garden. Taking walks in neighborhoods notorious for their great gardens is a great way to do this. If you see someone working in their garden, be quick about telling them how terrific things look. Most gardeners are friendly and just love to talk plants. You'll also find that most are also quite generous. Don't be afraid to ask for a slip or start of what they are working on. If they have a mature garden, they are probably on the lookout for ways to get rid of excess plants.

## Community Garden Groups

Join volunteer gardening organizations in your community. Native plant societies, city beautification work parties, and invasive plant clean up crews are some that come to mind. All of these activities will be filled with other gardeners. You can get free plants *and* advice as you work side by side and make new friends.

## Volunteer Plants

Keep your eyes open when you're working in your garden early in the spring for plants making their way up on their own. These plants are called "volunteer plants" or "babies" that are coming up from seed.

The volunteer plants will often be a surprise since you did not specifically plant them. This means they likely won't appear where you'd expect them to be. The volunteer plants are quite easy to unearth with your hoe as you clean up. Simply save them, mark them or pot them up and move to a safe place to get a bit bigger before planting them in a permanent spot.

## Save Seeds

If you already have plants, simply [save their seeds](#) to use in future years. It's an easy, eco-friendly way to get free plants. You can either start by using them to grow new plants indoors to place in the garden or sow them directly into the garden in the spring/summer. Also, be sure to save more than you need for your own garden. This will give you a supply of [seeds](#) to trade with others to bring in new plants to your garden for free.

## Be Generous With Your Garden

While giving away extras from your own garden doesn't seem like a way to get free plants, in the world of gardening it's the way things work. The more generous you are, the more free plants that will end up at your door. I don't have a detailed explanation of why this works, but it does and you'll find that the more generous you are with the plants in your garden, the more that will find their way to your own garden.

## Get More Bang for Your Buck

While this isn't a free way to get plants from day one, it is a way to get them in future years. If you do need to purchase some plants, be sure to buy the kinds that will [pay dividends](#). Buy [perennial](#) plants that need dividing every 3 – 5 years.

You can also start your own cuttings from woody-stemmed type shrubs. Flowers like dahlias & calla lilies come from tubers that need to be divided regularly, too. Over just a few years,



an initial investment in these types of plants will yield a very full garden.

There are also numerous houseplants that you can divide. Some, like the easy-to-care-for spider plant, will even produce babies for you.

If you've got other suggestions about ways to procure free plants, I'd love to [hear about them](#) – I'll just have to clear out another flower bed first!

Here's a quick video on how to divide perennials if you're not quite sure how to do it:

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## 5 DIY Tips That'll Transform Your Home

It's 2020, which is a great year for DIY-ers. The world of Pinterest and DIY blogs have skyrocketed us into a new era of decorating our houses. Say goodbye to pricey home furnishings and hello to sustainable, recycled/upcycled home decor. With the right resources, you can transform your living situation into an Instagram worthy space without spending a lot of money.

Most people who plan on selling their home don't want to spend too much extra money preparing to look presentable. Staging is an important step in the real estate process, but you don't always need to go out and buy a ton of new items. In today's article, I'm going to provide you with 5 DIY tips to take your home from outdated to fabulous and ready to sell!

## Create additional storage

You don't have to install a new closet or cupboards to upgrade your storage. Start by revamping what you already have. For example, repurpose old wooden planks for shelves in the kitchens and the bathrooms. Not only is this super inexpensive, but it'll also make your home look more roomy and put together. Most people look out for good storage when house hunting, and some quick DIY upgrades can go a long way. Of course, that's not to say you should avoid brand-new fittings altogether! Sometimes, store-bought storage options – such as these [Garage Cabinets](#) – can provide you with solutions that you never would have considered or been able to fit yourself.

## Make your kitchen inviting

The kitchen is one of the most important rooms when it comes to the success of a house sale. We understand that kitchen remodels can be extremely expensive, but there are some very affordable options that won't cost you much at all. Start by looking into repainting the walls with a brighter color or even adding a backsplash. Other [DIY tips](#) for staging your kitchen include creating a vignette by rearranging some of the decor to draw attention to specific parts of the room. You can do this with flower arrangements, cook books, and even appliances!

## Create a dining room tablescape

Have a dining room that could use some help? Have a little fun by creating an eye catching tablescape for it. Start with a tablecloth or throw and layer on placemats, centerpieces, napkins, plates, and silverware. Not only will this spruce up an otherwise bland room, but it will also make the house look more valuable overall. Try to match the look of the house and

also keep it simple. The goal is to add taste, not overdo it!

## **Upgrade the landscaping**

The exterior of your house is the first thing that people will see, and first impressions count. Start by adding grass seed to the front yard to help the yard blossom into something more lively. Have flower beds that could use some work? Add some new mulch to clean up your garden and create framing or walkways with stones. Fresh landscaping is one of the most valuable [home improvements](#) you can make and oftentimes yield the highest return on investment. And, you don't have to spend thousands of dollars to hire a professional landscape.

## **Declutter the house**

When people view a house, the last thing they want to see is clutter everywhere. Declutter rooms such as the living room and bedroom by artfully rearranging furniture and decorations to create space within the room. You might want to think about hiring a waste removal company, [click here](#) for more information, so that anything you really do not need can be disposed of in enough time before people come around to see the house. Getting ready to sell is a perfect time to do a proper clear out as you don't want to be taking these things with you. You can also use items like books and pillows to bring attention towards eye catching parts of the room. These rooms are also good spaces to try out new storage ideas to assist in organizing all of your belongings!

Staging your home doesn't need to be an expensive and over the top endeavor. Use some of these DIY tips to add storage, create space, and direct people's attention towards attractive features. You'll have no issues impressing the people who come to view your home!